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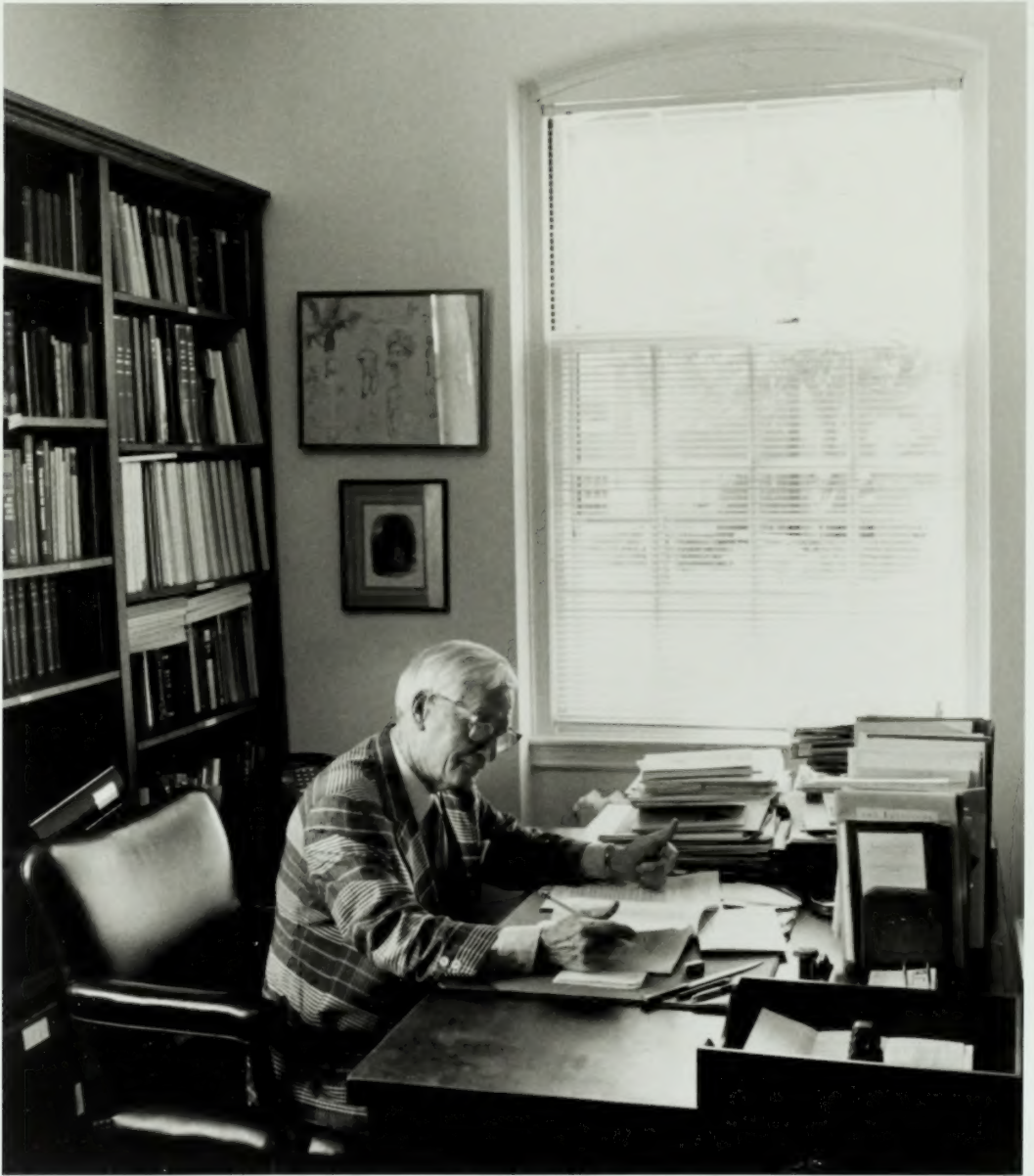














**THE ATHENIAN AGORA: EVIDENCE AND INTERPRETATION**

**Homer A. Thompson**

**Interviewed by Richard Cándida Smith and Claire L. Lyons**

**Art History Oral Documentation Project**

Compiled under the auspices  
of the  
**Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities**

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Frontispiece: Homer Thompson in his office at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. Photograph by Cliff Moore, courtesy of Homer Thompson.





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Richard Cándida Smith, Associate Professor of History and Director, Program in American Culture at the University of Michigan, and Dr. Claire L. Lyons, Curator in Collection Development and Curatorial Projects at the Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities interviewed Homer Thompson in his office at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. A total of 10.5 hours were recorded. The transcript was edited by Katherine P. Smith. During his review of the transcript Professor Thompson made moderate changes throughout for clarification and occasionally elaboration of a point. Inserted comments of significant length are indicated by brackets.





## CURRICULUM VITAE

Homer A. Thompson

Born September 7, 1906; Devlin, Ontario, Canada

Married 1934 to Dorothy Burr (Thompson); three daughters

### Education:

1925 B.A. University of British Columbia

1927 M.A. University of British Columbia

1929 Ph.D. University of Michigan

### Professional Career:

- 1925–27 Instructor in Classics, University of British Columbia  
1929–38 Fellow, American School of Classical Studies at Athens  
1929– Staff Member, Excavation of the Athenian Agora, for the American School of Classical Studies at Athens  
1933–41 Assistant Professor, Classical Archaeology, Toronto  
1941–46 Associate Professor, Classical Archaeology, Toronto  
1946–47 Prof. and Head of the Dept. of Art and Archaeology, Toronto  
1933–47 Assistant Director of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, and Curator of the Classical Collection  
1947–68 Field Director, Excavation of the Athenian Agora  
1947– Professor of Classical Archaeology, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton; Emeritus 1977–  
1954–71 Visiting Professor at Princeton University  
1959–60 George Eastman Visiting Professor at Oxford University  
1964 Geddes-Harrower Professor at University of Aberdeen  
1968–69 Visiting Professor at Columbia University  
1972 Distinguished Visitor Award, Australian-American Education Foundation  
1978–79 Norton Lecturer, Archaeological Institute of America  
1978 Regents' Lectureship, University of California, Berkeley

### War Service:

- 1942–45 Lieutenant Royal Canadian Naval Reserve: On loan 1943–45 to Royal Navy as Intelligence Officer in the Adriatic.



Memberships:

Archaeological Institute of America  
American Numismatic Society  
Society of Architectural Historians  
American Philosophical Society  
American Academy of Arts and Sciences  
Royal Society of Canada  
British Academy (corresponding)  
Society for Promotion of Hellenic Studies (honorary)  
Society of Antiquaries of London  
Greek Archaeological Society (honorary)  
German Archaeological Institute (honorary)  
Heidelberg Academy of Sciences  
Göteborg Academy  
Swedish Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities  
Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters  
Canadian Mediterranean Institute (Honorary Fellow)

Honors:

Commander, Order of the Phoenix (Greece, 1956)  
Honorary Citizenship of Athens, 1956  
Honorary Degrees from the following Universities:  
    British Columbia (1949) LLD  
    Dartmouth (1957)  
    Michigan (1957)  
    Toronto (1961)  
    Athens (1963)  
    Lyons (1963)  
    Freiburg I. Br. (1966)  
    Wooster (1972)  
    New York (1972)  
    Pris X Nanterre (1984)  
    Queen's (Kingston) (1986)  
Gold Medal for Distinguished Archaeological Achievement from the Archaeological  
    Institute of America (1972)  
The Lucy Wharton Drexel Gold Medal of the University Museum, University of  
    Pennsylvania (1978)  
Kenyon Medal for Classical Studies from the British Academy (1991)



Thomas Jefferson Medal for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities, from the  
American Philosophical Society, April 26, 1996

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Publications (Partial):

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*The Athenian Agora: A Short Guide 1976*

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"Some Consequences of the Worship of Heroes in Ancient Athens." *Scientific Yearbook of the Philosophical School of the University of Athens* (1964): 274–284. (in modern Greek).

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"	1947	<i>Hesperia</i> XVII (1948): 149–196.
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"	1949	<i>Archaeology</i> II (1949): 184f.
"	1950	<i>Hesperia</i> XX (1951): 45–60.
"	1950	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i> (1950/51): 141–151.
"	1951	<i>Hesperia</i> XXI (1952): 83–113.
"	1952	<i>Hesperia</i> XXIII (1953): 25–26.
"	1952	<i>AJA</i> 57 (1953): 25–56.
"	1953	<i>Hesperia</i> XXIII (1954): 31–67.





Season of	1954	<i>Hesperia</i> XXIV (1955): 50–71.
"	1955	<i>Hesperia</i> XXV (1956): 46–68.
"	1956	<i>Hesperia</i> XXVI (1957): 99–107.
"	1957	<i>Hesperia</i> XXVII (1958): 145–160.
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SESSION ONE: 7 OCTOBER, 1994.

[Tape I, Side One]

SMITH: The first question we usually ask people is the simplest one, which is where and when were you born?

THOMPSON: Well, I wasn't around at the time, but it's reported that I was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1906—September 7.

SMITH: Could you tell me a little bit about your family. How long had they been in Canada and what kind of work did they do?

THOMPSON: They had been in Canada for a couple of generations. On my father's side it was Scottish, on my mother's side it was Irish—Northern Ireland—and they had come over a little after the middle of the nineteenth century and settled in the Ottawa Valley, on the Quebec side of the river. They had large families at that time—ten, eleven, twelve—and since they were all farmers, this was a farming community. They ran out of land, and my branch of the family moved west. They settled out on the west coast in British Columbia, in the Fraser Valley, near a village called Rosedale, where they hewed their farm out of the virgin forest.

SMITH: So you grew up in British Columbia?

THOMPSON: I grew up in British Columbia.

SMITH: How far away were you from Vancouver?

THOMPSON: Oh, about ninety miles, so naturally I went to college in British



Columbia.

SMITH: Did your parents have college educations?

THOMPSON: No, they just had a good high-school education. There were excellent schools back there in Quebec at that time, and my father knew his Greek and Latin. According to one family tradition, that was why "Homer" was my given name. My parents, I am told, had gotten tired of "Tom," "Dick," and "Harry" as given names and they decided on something else so they chose "Homer." I should warn you though that there's another tradition according to which my mother, long before she met my father, had had a beau by the name of "Homer." I'm in no position to decide between those two. [laughter]

SMITH: Did you learn Greek and Latin as a child?

THOMPSON: No, at high school. I did Latin at high school throughout, but I began Greek in college.

SMITH: What about your family's religious background? Did you go to church every Sunday?

THOMPSON: Yes, the family was pretty regular in its church attendance and my father had helped in building the first church in the area.

SMITH: You were Presbyterian?

THOMPSON: Presbyterian to begin with and then United, when three churches came together in Canada. There it was perhaps more a social center for the





community than a religious center. This was a very young and very small community and the church was the center of community life, and as such it was tremendously influential.

SMITH: We've been asking people the role and the level of culture that existed in their family homes as they were growing up. Were you introduced to a wide variety of literature? Did you know about painting and music?

THOMPSON: Not so much painting as music. My mother was very good at the piano. She had been a music teacher, in fact, so we had a good deal of music.

Occasionally neighbors would be invited in for a little concert around the piano. She tried to teach me, and gave me a few lessons, but soon gave me up as hopeless, so I play no instrument. I just sit back and enjoy music.

SMITH: Did you go to Europe at all as a child or a teenager?

THOMPSON: No, I first went to Europe in 1929.

SMITH: When you went to Athens the first time?

THOMPSON: Yes, yes.

SMITH: It sounds like you grew up in somewhat of a frontier community?

THOMPSON: Yes, it was quite literally that. We had the Indians living right alongside us, and we had good relations with them. This group of Indians depended largely at that time on hunting and fishing, and when times were thin, we bought fish from them. The Fraser River was full of excellent salmon, and we would provide an



Indian family with a barrel and a certain amount of salt, and they would fill it with salmon and bring it back—twenty-five cents a fish.

SMITH: The British and the American education systems are so very different, and in some ways the cultural and intellectual life is different, and Canada sits between the two. I was wondering, as you were growing up, how your family viewed this balance of British influence and American influence, just a few miles across the border—or perhaps more accurately, U.S. influence.

THOMPSON: Yes, we had far more contacts with the American states immediately south of British Columbia than with eastern Canada, and academic communication was more frequent and more significant I think on the north-south axis. All sorts of contests were held between the University of British Columbia, and the universities of Washington, especially Washington of course, Oregon, and down to San Francisco. So that very easy communication was just taken for granted as a matter of course. Even [now] people in British Columbia and Alberta in many ways feel closer to the states to the south than they do to Ottawa. My sisters, who take more interest in politics than I do, are almost violently anti-French, and when Ottawa is dominated by someone who is prepared to countenance giving more favors to the French Canadians, they become really violent on the subject. No, we always had easy relations with the states to the south, and there was a lot of coming and going of all sorts. A lot of people went down for their winters to California, and nowadays of





course they go down very commonly to Florida, or to Hawaii.

SMITH: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

THOMPSON: There were five in the family. I had two brothers and two sisters.

SMITH: How many of them went on to college as you did?

THOMPSON: Well, our parents must have been very good managers because they were able to offer each of us who was interested in it a college education or the equivalent. Four of us went to college and got at least our first degrees. One of my sisters became a trained nurse, and one of them became a teacher of French at high-school level. One of my brothers was a loner. He went into business, and he's the only affluent member of the family, so to speak. One of them went into the department of agriculture in the neighboring province of Alberta and spent his life partly in teaching in the University of Alberta and partly keeping in touch with the experimental farms all through the province. Then he settled down to farming and he was able to own a farm of a thousand acres in Alberta with up-to-date modern equipment. He was able with the help of his one son to produce far more than our whole family had produced in my generation. So I felt less and less guilty about leaving the farm. [laughter] There was no longer a need for as many farmers as there had been.

SMITH: You said in high school you studied Latin. What other subjects were taught?



THOMPSON: Just the normal ones: English literature; history, geography, a taste of science—physics and chemistry; and mathematics and algebra of course.

SMITH: When did you decide that classics was going to be the field you wanted to study?

THOMPSON: Well, in high school I was very fortunate in having an absolutely first-rate teacher of Latin, and that made it seem worthwhile, so I decided to major in classics at university. And again I was extremely fortunate in teachers. There were three members of the faculty in classics at the University of British Columbia, and they were a very good combination. One of them, Lemuel Robertson, was a Canadian from Prince Edward Island, which is famous for its potatoes and its classical scholars—its principal exports. He got his education at McGill University in Montreal. A second member of the department, Harry Logan, was also of Canadian origin. He had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and was very much influenced by that. The third was a man by the name of Otto J. Todd, who was very much a Harvard man—an excellent scholar and a very good teacher. They made an enormous impression on me, and made the subject of classical studies seem thoroughly worthwhile.

SMITH: Were you trained in both philological and archaeological methods?

THOMPSON: No, in my undergraduate days it was entirely philological and historical, but they at least awakened me to the possibility of finding good things in



archaeology. The first formal courses I had in archaeology were in my graduate days at the University of Michigan.

SMITH: Did you go to Michigan with the concept of training in archaeology? Had you made that shift from language-based to object-based?

THOMPSON: At Michigan at that time there was known to be a very good group of classical scholars, a strong department. My primary purpose in choosing Michigan was to work under a man by the name of Arthur E. R. Boak. I enjoyed that relationship very much. Even at Michigan there was very little in the way of formal instruction in archaeology at that time, but a man by the name of John Garrett Winter gave a course in the topography of Athens, and he was an excellent teacher.

As time went on, in the two years I was at Michigan, I became more and more interested in archaeology, though I did my doctoral dissertation on a papyrological subject: "The Transport of Revenue Grain in Greco-Roman Egypt." Michigan had been active in Egypt and had built up one of the best collections of papyri on this continent; there was plenty of new material there for young people to work on. I worked on those bearing on the transport of tax grain in Greco-Roman Egypt.

Also on the faculty at Michigan at that time was a man by the name of Benjamin Dean Meritt. The Agora excavations were very much in the air, in the planning stage, and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens was beginning to put together a staff to conduct the excavation. They'd already chosen the field





director, Professor Theodor Leslie Shear, and then they had to find some junior people, and my name was suggested by Meritt as a candidate for that position. There were a couple of fellowships available for it. I had done a course in Thucydides with Meritt and we seemed to hit it off pretty well together. That started me on a straight road along archaeological lines.

SMITH: Were these decisions that you were making along the way, or did opportunities open up and you then evaluated what you wanted to do?

THOMPSON: I'm afraid I've been an opportunist all the way along. [laughter] I've taken advantage of good opportunities when they turned up. But at that time it did seem to me as I considered it seriously that archaeology was the most promising field in classical studies. There was plenty of old material, and what's more there was plenty of new material coming in. For a young person it was a stirring and exciting prospect. But then the way was opened to me by this appointment. So I was appointed as one of the first two junior members of the staff, along with a man of about the same age at Cornell, Frederick O. Waage. These were appointments for three years—\$1500 annually.

SMITH: That was a lot more money back then.

THOMPSON: That was a very good fellowship in those days.

SMITH: Did you know Campbell Bonner?

THOMPSON: Yes, yes indeed. I greatly enjoyed his courses. One that I took in my



last year there was on Aristophanes. Bonner was an extremely serious scholar and a very serious man, but he was a very good teacher of Aristophanes. Among the plays we read was *The Acharnians*. You may remember that in the opening scene in *The Acharnians* the main character is seated on the slopes of Pnyx Hill looking down into the Agora. There's a very vivid little passage describing what he saw there: fellow citizens still strolling around in the Agora when they should have been up on the Pnyx attending the meeting of the Ekklesia. It gives one a very vivid glimpse of the topographical setting of public life in Athens: the Pnyx up on the hill and the Agora down below.

When I got to Athens I went up to the Pnyx Hill, but I soon discovered that there was no absolute certainty that the actual assembly place had been truly recognized or identified. This seemed very strange to me in view of the role it played in *The Acharnians* of Aristophanes, which I had very much admired in my first reading in Michigan. So I looked around in the literature and found that on no less than four occasions, excavations had been made in the hope of establishing the identification. None of them led to certain results. I got in touch with the man who had most recently done actual excavation on the Pnyx. This was Dr. Konstantine Kourouniotis, who at that time was Director of the Department of Antiquities in the Greek government. I found he was a very approachable person and still very much interested in the Pnyx, although at the end of his own investigations he had left the





question open as to the identification of the assembly place. He said he had had to break off his work there because of his preoccupation with other matters, but he said that more work should be done.

I've forgotten whether it was he or I who suggested that we get together on this, but in any case an agreement was worked out, a cooperation between the American School and the Department of Antiquities. Kourouniotis and I were, so to speak, jointly in charge of the operation. I supervised the actual excavation on a regular basis. He was busy elsewhere, all over Greece, especially at Eleusis in those days, but he would drop in as often as he could. At that time he was a ripe scholar. He had been excavating for many years, especially at Eleusis, but also at various other sites, so he was a very valuable guide for a young person engaged in his first excavation. We had a good long season in 1930–31, before the fieldwork began in the Agora, and established the basic development of the assembly place, and then I wrote it up, and it appeared as a long article in the first number of the American School's journal *Hesperia*. [As a result of our extensive trenching we had put the identification of the assembly place beyond question and had established three periods in its structural history: I) circa 500 B. C.; II) the end of the fifth century B. C.; III) with much hesitation, in the time of Emperor Hadrian. The basic structural schemes proposed in this first report for the three periods still seems acceptable, but many minor improvements have been made and the dating of Period III has been put back



to the fourth century B. C.]

Subsequently I did further work up on the Pnyx Hill. We discovered that in the late fourth century B.C. the construction of a pair of great stoas had been started on top of the hill, obviously in close association with the actual assembly place.

These were intended, no doubt, to shelter the citizens between speeches or in case of rain or too hot sun. [But the foundations for the stoas had barely been completed when some military necessity led to the abandonment of the stoa program, and the foundations were overlaid by a length of fortification wall designed to shorten the older circuit by cutting off a protruding section.] That brought us into the question of the fortifications of the city in that area, so we explored about a kilometer of the city walls of ancient Athens in all their periods. We also explored, on a neighboring hilltop, the monumental tomb of Philopappos, the last ruler in the royal line of the eastern principality of Commagene. This work went on over the next three or four years and I had various associates.

My main wish of course was to get on with the Agora excavation, so I put in an appearance when fieldwork started there in May of 1931. From then on my main preoccupation was naturally the Agora excavations proper. But this initial truancy seemed to me justified because of the close association between the Pnyx and the Agora. After all, the Pnyx was the seat of the sovereign element in the Athenian government and we were going to work down in the Agora in the hope of finding



where the other elements in Athenian government functioned. The Pnyx has been in my mind again of late with the emphasis being put on the birth of western democracy, as it's said, with Kleisthenes at the end of the sixth century B.C. A little more attention has been focused on the Pnyx. There has always been a trickle of articles about it suggesting corrections and improvements on our original conclusions and publications.

Quite recently, last year, I discovered that one old friend, an Australian scholar at the University of New England in Australia, had become much interested in the Pnyx and was working on it. Shortly after that I learned again by chance that a member of the newly established Finnish Institute of Archaeology in Athens, established some four years ago, was also doing research on the Pnyx. Neither had realized that the other was working on the same theme. So I got them together by correspondence. They hit it off very well together and organized a symposium in Athens on the subject of the Pnyx and the history of Athens, and that begins tomorrow morning at nine o'clock in Athens.

SMITH: We started this discussion because you were talking about reading *The Acharnians* in Campbell Bonner's class, and I wondered the degree to which, in the 1920s, reading of classical literature posed specifically archaeological questions. At that time, the way in which the texts were being read might suggest problems that weren't literary problems but problems of a more specifically archaeological or object-





oriented nature.

THOMPSON: Yes, as I said, Bonner was a very stimulating teacher, and it was he who aroused my interest in that aspect of *The Archanians*. Yes, you're quite right. It is this quality of classical archaeology that has been its great attraction for me; I mean the abundance of both literary evidence and archaeological evidence which can be correlated, so that the one enriches the other, and the one controls the other. I know classical archaeology is regarded very much as an old-fashioned and out-dated branch of archaeology, but from my point of view it's much the richest branch of the discipline, because so often you can control conclusions that have been arrived at from the literary evidence by archaeological data, and vice versa. In that respect it approximates a science. It would be a mistake to regard it as a science, but it comes closer than any of the other branches of classical studies, and I hope it will always flourish, in spite of the preachings of the new archaeologists.

SMITH: Well actually, we will get into the new archaeology later on, but I'd like to stay in the 1920s for the time being, when it isn't even on the horizon. [laughter]

THOMPSON: On this subject, another area that was opening up or had opened up at that time was papyrology; the vast influx of new evidence gave us much more detailed firsthand evidence for the state of things in an important part of the ancient world over several centuries—

SMITH: Now that relates to your dissertation topic. Did you select your topic, or



were you guided into it?

THOMPSON: The choice more or less grew out of a collaboration. It was Arthur Boak who suggested the subject, as I remember, because he knew the field very well. He said, "There's good evidence for this important matter, and it hasn't been worked up. Why don't you take it on?"

SMITH: What kind of seminar problems do you remember working on? What were the initial steps by which you were trained at Michigan?

THOMPSON: [In my time at Michigan (1927–1929), there were a good many students majoring in classics at the undergraduate level, but comparatively few graduate students. All faculty members taught both undergraduate and graduate courses. Consequently almost all teaching was done in lecture form; there was little in the way of seminars. The classics department had close relations with neighboring departments, notably history. Thus my special advisor and the director of my dissertation was Professor Boak of the history department, his specialties being late imperial Roman history and papyrology. But there was a strong group in classics proper. I mentioned Campbell Bonner, Benjamin Dean Meritt, and John Garrett Winter earlier, but I also took courses with Warren Blake (Greek lyric poetry), and Henry Sanders (Greek and Roman paleography). These were all good lecturers and good teachers.

The university library was strong for classical studies and also very accessible



since the building also contained faculty offices and small seminar rooms. That the librarian at that time, Dr. Bishop, was chosen by the Vatican to advise on the updating of the Vatican Library catalog may be taken as an indication of the standing of the University of Michigan Library.]

SMITH: What languages were you trained in and what languages do you use in your work?

THOMPSON: From my courses I had a reading knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin. Modern Greek was to come later from life in Athens. I had a little French in college, and a little German—just reading knowledge—and of course those are absolutely essential for archaeology nowadays. German above all, and French and Italian are all taken for granted. One should have Russian nowadays, but a good many of the Russian scholars are English-speaking. We had a visit from two of them at the Institute [for Advanced Study] a couple of months; they had American fellowships. One was a classical scholar who is spending most of her time at the Metropolitan Museum while her husband is based at the Museum of Modern Art. They came over here and spent a day with us, and it was very good to meet them at firsthand. They were both highly intelligent people, well trained, speaking excellent English. As English speakers we are almost spoiled by the fact that so many of the others know English. But a knowledge of Russian is very valuable. The Russians have done a lot of excellent work in classical archaeology, especially in the old Greek





colonies in the area of the north shore of the Black Sea. But certainly to get anywhere in classical archaeology nowadays you've got to have your German, your French, and your Italian.

SMITH: Which of the ancient languages do you work in?

THOMPSON: Well, I've kept up some little competence in Greek and Latin. I never got around to doing anything in Sanskrit. One of my old colleagues here, Harold Cherniss, in ancient philosophy, knew his Sanskrit well. The first president of Princeton University knew his Greek, his Latin and his Sanskrit.

SMITH: That's interesting. Have you studied Egyptian or the Semitic languages?

THOMPSON: I haven't studied the language or the script. I leave that to others.

But I've taken every advantage to learn more about the Egyptian monuments, and I do recommend any young person entering the field of classical archaeology to get to Egypt as early as possible in his or her career. I had the good fortune to have a week in Egypt on my Christmas holidays in 1929. A group of four of us went down from Athens to Egypt, and in three or four days we got up the Nile as far as Aswân. It was an unforgettable experience, and tremendously illuminating. There you have the great old monuments fairly well preserved, and they were so obviously the monuments that inspired the first beginnings of monumental art in Greece, both of architecture and of painting especially. Then if you continue up to Abu Simbel you see the great temples cut in the face of the cliff, and there on the legs of the seated colossus you see graffiti



scratched in the stone—names of Greeks who had been there—soldiers in the service of Pharaoh, in the sixth century B.C.; many give their place of origin. It's one of the most interesting and important documents that we have with regard to the relations between Greece and Egypt. Well, the evidence is there, it just hits you in the eye, it's overwhelming—the documentation regarding the fundamental impact of Egyptian art on the infant art of Greece—and that is so important that it should come as early as possible in any classical archaeologist's career.

SMITH: Was this a perspective that was taught in school when you were either at British Columbia or at Michigan?

THOMPSON: No, it wasn't. Not enough emphasis was put on it. I wasn't aware of it until I got to Egypt. We were all interested in Egypt in a sort of romantic way, but I hadn't realized the importance of an actual autopsy; its importance for an understanding of the beginnings of Greek art—that is to say architecture and painting and the minor arts as well. A lot of nonsense has been talked of late as you know about the importance of "African art." It has been touted as a great rival of Greek art. Well, it's absurd to regard this as a new idea. Anyone working with classical art was aware of the important influence from the side of Egypt, and the author of this new so-called idea constantly confuses Egyptian art with African art, and he doesn't keep them distinct. So he's tilting against windmills, at the cost of a great waste of ink and scholarly time. [laughter]



SMITH: What about the methods of literary source criticism as they were understood and taught in the 1920s?

THOMPSON: Well, Professor Bonner at Michigan was most emphatic about that area of classical studies. He was a very good scholar.

[Tape I, Side Two]

THOMPSON: On the matter of text criticism, Otto Todd, the Harvard-trained member of the classical department of the University of British Columbia, was a very fine scholar himself. He was the author, for instance, of an index to Aristophanes that is still the standard work on the subject and a very good working tool. He was very careful in his reading of the text and insisted that we be careful too. I didn't have much formal instruction in this matter; it was rather remote from what soon became my main interest. I think it's really important that anyone who wants to get far in classical archaeology nowadays really should have some knowledge of Greek to be able to get at the exactly right meaning, not only of the literary texts but of newly found inscriptions. So often the understanding of particular meanings or the exact meaning of a particular word makes all the difference in the world to an interpretation.

LYONS: Was Professor Meritt teaching epigraphy at that point?

THOMPSON: Oh yes. He was just beginning his career in epigraphy. He had been very much interested in Thucydides, and his first work in Greece was to check up on





Thucydides' reference to Athenian activities way up in northern Greece, in the Chalcidice, and that was, as I remember, his very first published article. It was a study of what happened up there at a site that has only recently been excavated. Yes, he was very, very good on Thucydides, and it was that of course that led him into the study of the Athenian tribute lists. Meritt exemplifies very well the combination of the two sub-branches, that is the literary and the archaeological. His work on the tribute lists is a splendid example of the fruitfulness of that approach.

SMITH: How much concern was there about linguistic shifts and the effects they might have on the meanings of words over several centuries?

THOMPSON: Yes, well, one certainly has to have that in mind. Perhaps notably in reading and understanding Thucydides, and again understanding Aristotle in such a work as the *Constitution of the Athenians*. Yes, that's very important. So again, one should have a working knowledge of Greek. For a classical archaeologist it really is essential. Some universities in this country, and I think increasingly even in Europe, are teaching classical archaeology without requiring the teaching of the Greek language, which is a great pity. I think they shouldn't be separated. But there are so many new subjects creeping into the curricula.

SMITH: I guess when you were studying classics, there was ancient Rome and ancient Greece. Was the ancient Near East included as part of the classics?

THOMPSON: No, it was not, it didn't get nearly as much attention then as it does



now.

SMITH: But it was Rome and Greece, certainly.

THOMPSON: It was Rome and Greece essentially, yes.

SMITH: And you had a special affinity for Greece?

THOMPSON: Yes, yes.

SMITH: Have you ever thought about why Greece instead of Rome?

THOMPSON: Well, I suppose it was the teaching of such people as Bonner that led to that. It always seemed to me that there was something fresh and more original in Greek literature and in Greek civilization than in Roman civilization. But certainly you've got to pay attention to them all. Even working there in the heart of Athens, as I have for most of my life, I realized that one has got to consider both the Greek and the Roman, because Rome derived so much from Greece, and then Rome later exercised such a very powerful influence on Greece. So that you've really got to have both of them, and you'd better treat them both sympathetically if you want to get the most out of them.

SMITH: What do you mean by that, "treat them sympathetically"?

THOMPSON: Well, otherwise you may distort the evidence, as is often done.

SMITH: Why would you distort the evidence?

THOMPSON: Well, you can let your personal prejudices play too strong a role in your judgment. There are of course among classical archaeologists today those who



favor the Greek and those who favor the Roman. But in my time, even in the past fifty, sixty years, much greater emphasis has been put on contacts between the classical lands, Greece and Rome, and Egypt and the Near East. That's one of the great things that has happened in the field of classical studies, including archaeology, in our own lifetimes. This is something that has been done very well in various universities in this country—at Michigan, and at other universities and such colleges as Bryn Mawr, where archaeology is taken seriously, and everybody has profited enormously. Of course classical scholars now have to think about contacts even with India and China. That too is good; it greatly enriches our discipline.

SMITH: Who were the Greek authors that you were most attached to?

THOMPSON: Well, I favored the historians Herodotus and Thucydides, and Aristophanes I found very enjoyable and enlightening in giving one a picture of ancient Greek life at all levels. I read a good deal of the tragedians, but I was never taken by them as I was by Aristophanes. Of course they're essential to an understanding of ancient Greece and should be invoked nowadays. So many people talk so glibly about the maltreatment of women in ancient Greece. I think anyone who wants to investigate this question seriously should reread some of the Greek tragedies, in which it is perfectly obvious that women were highly respected and really exercised great influence, even though they were not always at the forefront. There was so often a woman of power behind the throne. But in general I favored the





historical authors.

SMITH: What were the particular problems that you had to solve in your dissertation?

THOMPSON: Well, it might be thought to have been a rather mechanical operation. I assembled all the papyri that related to the handling of grain both by the state and by private business. First I had to work out the system of tax payment in grain current in the Ptolemaic period, and then I had to study the mechanics of it. It gave me a very interesting insight into Egyptian bureaucracy in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. It was very interesting indeed to see the actual firsthand documents from the archives of municipalities. Equally interesting was the evidence available for the enormously important export of grain by private Egyptian dealers to Near Eastern countries as documented by papyrus letters such as those in the Zenon Archive. It was really very exciting to learn that for ancient Egypt we now have so much direct archival evidence. That of course has been splendidly exploited in our time, and this is still going on. My dissertation was a kind of elementary exercise in the use of ancient papyri. Having gotten involved in fieldwork in Athens, I had to break off my active interest in papyrology, to my regret. I would have gladly gone farther in it, but I just didn't find the time.

SMITH: What was the graduate community like at Michigan?

THOMPSON: There were a number of good young people working there. Those



who were doing highly specialized work, working for doctorates, were few in number, and I regret to say I really haven't kept in touch with any of them.

SMITH: Did any of them go into archaeology?

THOMPSON: No, I was the only one at that time, which is strange, because Michigan had already been active in actual fieldwork, not only in Egypt, but also in Carthage. It is strange that this was not followed up by the young people at Michigan. They did important work in Egypt, especially out in the Faiyum, a fertile farming area to the west of the Nile. The material they brought back from there formed the core of the present exhibition in the Kelsey Museum [of Archaeology] in Ann Arbor. One of the best collections of material illustrating ancient life, chiefly Hellenistic and Roman, is from their own excavations in the Faiyum and especially from the town of Karanis. I visited Karanis years later on one of my trips to Egypt, and talked with one of the old guards who had been on the job for years and years, but he still remembered the people from Michigan . . . remembered their names even, this Egyptian guard.

The excavators brought back an enormous quantity of ancient glass, which was worked up by an English scholar who came over specifically to do a catalog of the findings. This was Donald Harden, who became a leading authority on glass of the classical and Roman periods. He had a very distinguished career back in England, but he got his real beginning at the University of Michigan in those years, in the late



1920s and early 1930s.

The work at Carthage had been a special interest of professor [Francis W.] Kelsey. He worked for a couple of seasons there and made some important observations and discoveries, but with Kelsey's death Carthage was dropped, only to be taken up much, much later, just some ten years ago, when teams from this country, Canada, and Europe got together, divided up the area of ancient Carthage and its hinterland, and proceeded to do proper excavations to save what could be saved of antiquity from the encroaching development of a holiday resort—a villa suburb sort of thing. That has been going on now for a good many years with very considerable results. Most of the teams have finished their fieldwork, and I hope that some scholar will give us a really good general account of Carthage as known from these excavations.

SMITH: Did you receive any training in chemistry, mineralogy, or geology?

THOMPSON: No.

SMITH: How about architectural history?

THOMPSON: Well, it was taken for granted that we would work on that ourselves; I didn't have any formal training in it.

SMITH: So you would just read the books that were available?

THOMPSON: That's right, yes.

SMITH: Were they books written by classicists or by "architectural historians"?





THOMPSON: Well, I must admit that I learned most about ancient architecture from my own fieldwork. Professor Winter at Michigan was himself much interested in architecture, and we did a fair amount of reading in the history of architecture from his course on Athenian topography. But I came to take a much more serious interest in it after starting fieldwork myself and working with those two distinguished Greeks, Kourouniotis and John Travlos. Both of them had vast experience in handling classical architecture, and this drove me to do a good deal of reading myself. Of course the books on the subject are vastly better now than they were then.

SMITH: What about surveying?

THOMPSON: I took no formal training. I was spoiled in the very beginning of my career in archaeology by having John Travlos at my side. He was a good surveyor, and in my opinion the greatest archaeological architect of our time. We had him as our architect up on the Pnyx, at which time he was still completing his graduate studies at the Polytechnion in Athens.

SMITH: This may be a question that is shaped by the way contemporary academia works, but I wonder, back when you were in graduate school and you were about to leave for Athens, what were considered the major problems that needed to be solved in the field of archaeology?

THOMPSON: Of classical archaeology, or in general?

SMITH: Well, classical archaeology.



THOMPSON: Americans at that time were interested primarily in the excavation of cities and individual monuments, especially theaters. The American School of Classical Studies, as you know, began in 1881, and one of its first interests was in the ancient theater; it did a great deal of work in the ancient theaters here, there, and everywhere in Greece—Athens, Corinth, Eretria and Sikyon and various other places. American work on ancient theaters forms a whole chapter in the history of the American School of Classical Studies.

Then, in 1896, the American School of Classical Studies at Athens had started work on ancient Corinth and has been active there ever since. Their stated purpose in this really long and arduous program has been to recover the history and the scheme of the city in its successive periods and to work out its relations with the other old cities of Greece. Everyone connected with the American School has, I think, been influenced by the example of its work at Corinth. This was more or less in keeping with the times because the Germans and Austrians were doing tremendously important work of the same sort over in Asia Minor at just about that same time. I'm thinking of the splendid work they have done at Priene, at Miletus, at Pergamon, and Ephesos. In each case they put high priority on recovering the essential history and physical scheme of the city. Their work has given us a much better grasp of the setting of public and of private life in the Greek city-state. There was great emphasis on the city.



In quite recent times there has been more emphasis and more interest in the study of the hinterland of the city, the surrounding countryside on which the economy of the city was largely based, of course. That is something that has developed in our time, in fact, quite recently. The Russians took a leading part in this new approach in their study of ancient Greek cities on the north coast of the Black Sea. They paid attention to the hinterland as well as to the city proper. It was continued by a couple of my graduate students; we used to meet around this table in seminar. One of them did one of the first big and rewarding archeological surveys of mainland Greece. [I am speaking of William A. McDonald, a graduate of the University of Toronto, who spent most of his career at the University of Minnesota, having served on the staff of Professor Carl Blegen in the excavation of the Palace of Nestor at Pylos. Determined to learn more about the territory that must have supported the culture represented by the opulent palace, he organized a survey of an extensive area in the southwestern Peloponnesus.] His well organized program of fieldwork followed by prompt publication has served more or less as a role model for many of the subsequent surveys that have been carried out in Greece.

Another notable example of this we owe to another old graduate student of mine here at Princeton, who is now down at the University of Texas in Austin. This is Joseph Carter. He became interested in new Greece—the Greek colonies of south Italy and Sicily—and concentrated on Metapontum near Tarentum in south Italy. The





city proper had already been pretty well explored by the Italians themselves, so he concentrated on the hinterland and has been working on this program for the past twenty years. The results have been not spectacular but valuable in giving us a much better idea of the relationship between the city and its hinterland. And this has led to interesting results. I pointed out to him that the Russians had been doing this for a good while before he started. Last year he got in touch with our Russian colleagues, one of whom came over and talked with him at Austin, and then the Russians invited him to take some of his students over to Russia this past summer, and they worked together on the site of Chersonesus, one of the Greek colonies in the Crimea.

Carter was much impressed by what he saw there, and the way they were going about their work. They came on the remains of a substantial building, apparently a temple, with a fair amount of the architecture preserved. He asked at once to see a copy of the famous book on the profiles of Greek moldings by a contemporary of mine, Lucy Shoe—now Lucy Shoe Meritt, who also lives down in Austin now, the widow of Benjamin D. Meritt—in order to get a better idea of the date of this new building. Well, his Russian friends were much embarrassed about this. They said, "We know about that book, but we've never seen it; there isn't a copy in Russia." It had in fact a sad history of publication. It was being printed in Vienna on the outbreak of World War II, and only about one half of the total printing had been sent out of Austria. The other half has never been heard of since. So the book



had very limited distribution, and it's a very precious item now. The last time I saw it in a used-book catalog the price was \$500.

Joe Carter said he would do his best to remedy this situation, so when he got back to Austin he set to and had two folio volumes Xeroxed and sent the copy over. His Russian colleagues were delighted, and their response was really very moving. They replied both to Carter and to Lucy Meritt, the author of the book. This was a very happy illustration of international relations in the academic world. This idea of doing surveys of a big chunk of countryside, especially when it can be focused on a city of which a good deal is known already has been very profitable; one of the most interesting developments in my lifetime.

SMITH: You were saying in the 1920s the focus was on the city centers, and of course the Agora project is an example of that. I'm sure there's not just a single reason why there's that focus, but what were some of the reasons for it? Were people simply not interested in rural life, or didn't think of it as being significant to the Greece they wanted to study?

THOMPSON: Yes, they just weren't interested. And of course there were glorious other themes to pursue, such as the Periclean architectural monuments. Some of our ablest people in the early years of the century were working on the monuments of the Acropolis. I am thinking especially of William B. Dinsmoor, Sr., who was an early student at the American School in Athens, and then spent his academic life at



Columbia University. He was tremendously influential both in Athens and in his base at Columbia. He concentrated above all on the Greek temple. He knew all other forms of Greek architecture very well, and he did noble work in bringing up to date a very good older handbook of Greek architecture. He was a magnificent teacher and a good public lecturer. He could make almost any aspect of ancient architecture interesting even to a general audience. [His participation in the recent construction of an actual-size replica of the Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee, assures the exactitude of the copy.]

The director of the American School in those years, Bert Hodge Hill, was interested primarily in temple architecture, but he was also director of the School's excavations in Corinth from 1906 to 1926. He did some very important work on the history of the Parthenon. It was he who really established the sequence of buildings on the site. His work is still cited with great respect by the most recent scholars of these problems in the history of the Parthenon.

Then the School undertook to do a basic study of the Erechtheum, and there another prominent figure in the history of the study of ancient Greek architecture appears on the scene, Gorham [Phillips] Stevens. Largely under his direction various members of the School worked on a basic study of the Erechtheum—the surviving architecture and the surviving ancient inscriptions. Many of the building accounts of the Erechtheum have survived and add tremendously to the interest and the value of





the study of the building as an architectural monument. These were known before, but they had never been thoroughly worked on, and no one had combined and collated the architectural evidence with the epigraphic evidence. So this was one of the great things done by the School in its early days. It will stand out as one of its principal achievements in the overall picture, both of the School and of the history of ancient architecture.

At Corinth of course, the best preserved and most visible monument was the old temple of Apollo; that attracted the interest of the members of the School who were working there enormously. I suppose it is the most impressive monument of archaic Greek architecture in old Greece. There are much better preserved examples in the West. So it was natural that people should be interested in the study of individual monuments, above all, temples and theaters. There are quite a number of fairly well-preserved and very visible theaters throughout Greece. [Remember too that we are dealing with a period when there was a lively interest in Athenian drama. It is easy therefore to understand why temple and theater were the first types of ancient building to come under close scrutiny and to excite real interest on the part of architectural historians.]

SMITH: Did you receive any training in how to describe objects, or how to coordinate a group of objects so that one can relate them to each other? That type of activity occupies a considerable amount of time in one's professional life.



THOMPSON: Oh yes, it's absolutely basic. We got off to a good start in the Agora. The first field director of the Agora excavations, Leslie Shear, Sr., had worked on various other sites, including Rhodes and Sardis, and above all at Corinth, before taking on the Agora. He was a great stickler for this aspect of field archaeology—I mean the recording—and it was he who got us started on what I think has been a fairly successful scheme of cataloging and preparing for publication, and making accessible to members of the staff and to visiting scholars what you have found. There was no formal training. We had learned a lot, all of us, just from experience, working there in the Agora.

We also benefited from the contributions of Miss Lucy Talcott, who had done her college work chiefly in English literature and came late to classical studies. When she came to us in the Agora she was employed at once in the cataloging and records division. It was very largely to her that we owe the system of recording, both in the field and in the storeroom. She built up a remarkable system that had performed pretty well from the start and was found good enough to be continued, so there has been great uniformity in our field notebooks and in our catalog cards, from the beginning in 1931 right up to the present.

SMITH: What were the intellectual assumptions of that system, would you say?

THOMPSON: Well, there was of course a great emphasis in the fieldwork on stratification. The question of stratification in the Agora is a difficult one because the



site has been occupied so continuously for so long, and that part of town has suffered from invasion after invasion—ours being the most "destructive," I suppose. In places, we have started at the modern surface and gone down to bottom, to bedrock, a maximum depth of about twelve and a half meters. That's around forty feet. Over bedrock we normally find a scattering of Neolithic pottery. So there, in places, one might say we had complete stratification from roughly 3000 B.C. to the present.

In most areas the stratification of all periods has been greatly disturbed by later habitation. As I look back on the history of our excavation, I regret that we didn't insist on the field supervisors doing more in the way of drawing, especially of cross-sections. If I were starting to do another excavation I would insist on far more drawing. We had John Travlos with us in the beginning, and he did a great deal of drawing of plans and cross-sections, and we were spoiled—we left it to him. But it should have been done far more also by the individual trench supervisors. But our system of records is such that visiting scholars seem to be able to find out what they want to know about the results of our excavation and the context of finding of individual objects. It's there in good form on the catalog cards.

Then we paid special attention to "deposits" in the Agora. There were deposits from the ruins of buildings—floor deposits—but they play a minor part. We've been concerned more with deposits found in wells and cisterns, which oftentimes cover centuries, and in the case of a well give you a good stratification. In





the case of a cistern, it's normally filled at one time, and oftentimes, along with a vast amount of domestic debris—broken pottery, broken kitchen utensils, broken terracotta figurines—one could find a few datable coins, which give you a precise, absolute date, or inscribed amphora handles, which are now among the most precisely datable of the small finds in a classical site. We've paid great attention to these, and we keep a record of them—volume after volume—in the Record Room in the Stoa of Attalos. These records are organized in such a way that they can be used by all the members of the staff and all the visiting archaeologists and colleagues. Over the years we've been commended often by visiting scholars who want to get at the direct evidence provided by an excavation. This seems to be especially accessible in the Agora records. And we owe that very largely, as I say, to our first field director Shear and to this remarkable woman Lucy Talcott.

We were also fortunate in having had a good photographic service from the beginning. First, before the war, there was a German photographer, Hermann Wagner, but his behavior during the occupation was not to the liking of the Greeks and he became *persona non grata* and was not allowed back into the country afterwards. A member of our staff, Alison Frantz, had been with us almost from the beginning and had been largely engaged in the recording, but she was always, from childhood, interested in photography and took it on seriously. She came back home, took a course in photography in New York, and then for some twenty-five years was



our staff photographer. She became one of the leading archaeological photographers, especially of classical sculpture, in the whole world. Her basic appointment was with us, but she found time to produce photographs for the books of a number of distinguished scholars. John D. Beazley, Gisela M. A. Richter, Bernard Ashmole, and Martin Robertson all called on her to illustrate their works, so that we've been fortunate in having continuity in our architect and our photographer, as well as in the supervision of our records. Yes, these matters are to be taken seriously, especially in a very central place like Athens, and in an excavation that has produced so much of general interest.

[Tape II, Side One]

SMITH: You were talking about publications of your pottery.

THOMPSON: Yes, publications of our pottery and most classes or groups of material are of interest to people working all around the Mediterranean. Hence we feel a rather special obligation to make our material readily available not only to visiting scholars but also to people who are working back home in their studies. It's very fortunate too that we have been able to keep all our original records right there on the spot, beside the excavation, so that anyone interested in what he sees in the Agora Museum in the Stoa of Attalos, or out in the field, who wants to know what we've learned about it, just goes to the Record Room and gets the information firsthand. Hundreds and hundreds of field notebooks are there, filed, all the



photographs taken during the excavation are there, and the whole series of publications is there readily accessible, right on the spot.

LYONS: Are there duplicate sets of those records here at Princeton?

THOMPSON: Only to a limited extent. These cabinets are full of Agora photographs, but we have not done as the Germans very wisely have done in their excavations in Asia Minor; we don't have a complete set of our records here in this country. That is something greatly to be desired and perhaps should have been done from the start.

SMITH: Is that a question of money?

THOMPSON: Partly that, yes. It's a pity that it hasn't been done. There has always been difficulty when you have things on this scale—problems about space in the normal academic office. These records covered the period from the beginning of the excavation down to my retirement from the directorship in 1968. The records of subsequent work in the Agora are over in Princeton University, in the office of my successor, Leslie Shear, Jr. Somehow they've got to be combined. Just where they will be combined I don't know yet. I've got to talk it over with Leslie Shear and with the administration of the Institute for Advanced Study, which has been very generous with space over the past half century. It would be most desirable that the Agora records be kept together.

SMITH: Can you have a descriptive strategy without having an interpretive





framework guiding the way you look at things?

THOMPSON: Well, we have learned through experience to recognize the evidence for some of the major disasters in the history of Athens. For instance, the Persian sack of 480-479 B.C., the frightful depredations carried out by Sulla in 86 B.C., then the great damage done by the Herulii coming down from the Black Sea area in 267 A.D., and the coming of the Goths in 496 A.D. We have come to recognize the sorts of pottery that one finds in connection with those great events in Athenian history, and the coins and so on, and this in a way gives us fixed points in the history of the settlement. Still later of course the place was devastated by some nasty person [Leon Sgouros] who came up from Nauplia in 1204 A.D. and did a great deal of damage. Finally the area suffered in the Greek War of Independence [1821–1828].

We've had to take all these great events into account. In a way, they've been helpful because they oftentimes resulted in the preservation of masses of material, notably in the case of the Persian destruction of 480-479 B.C., where in cleaning up afterwards a great deal of material was thrown into wells or buried in pits dug for the purpose, or reused in new buildings. That has been tremendously helpful. Leslie Shear, Jr., has done a very detailed study of that recently. Yes, the archaeologist likes nothing better than a really destructive earthquake or a volcanic eruption, because it may preserve a good deal of evidence in a precisely datable form. The long occupation of the site and its varied fortunes have made the excavation of the Agora



difficult and have slowed it down, but have been helpful in some ways.

SMITH: I think we're about ready to go into the Agora work, but before we do that I had a couple of questions about your personal interests in the 1920s and 1930s. Did you have any interest in modern culture, and what we now call modernism—James Joyce, Ezra Pound, or T. S. Eliot in literature, or their equivalents in painting and music?

THOMPSON: No, I haven't taken any active interest in those areas of modern culture, no. I enjoy modern painting. I enjoy some modern literature. We have had a number of practitioners here at the Institute, including T. S. Eliot, who rather put me off on personal acquaintance. Music I don't practice but I do greatly enjoy.

SMITH: The period of the 1920s and the 1930s was a time of great interest in myth, in searching for general patterns in human activity that were crystallized in myth. And of course much of this relates to how one interprets Greek society and Greek culture. Were you interested in myth studies? [James] Frazer for example?

THOMPSON: I've read a great deal of Frazer in my time, yes, and realized his importance. He was very typical of his period in his approach to mythology. He was also ahead of his time in many ways, because he had a sort of proto-anthropological interest in things, which didn't appeal much at that time I think, but has subsequently been regarded as perhaps one of the most important aspects of his scholarship. The field archeologist is grateful to him above all for his edition of Pausanias, which is an



absolutely invaluable helpmate to the classical archaeologist working almost anywhere in Greece. Even in the Agora at many points we would have been helpless in the identification of monuments without Pausanias's sketch, and for Athens in general his account is simply invaluable. And Frazer dealt with Pausanias admirably. They had a good deal in common; they were congenial.

SMITH: By the approach typical of this time do you mean a tendency to overarching generalizations?

THOMPSON: Yes, and a great interest in matters religious and in mythology. Both Pausanias and Frazer shared those interests.

SMITH: Your generation then was not necessarily particularly interested in the questions of Greek religious thought or practice?

THOMPSON: In a limited way, yes. The most used and most read book on the subject in my youth was a Cambridge woman's book on the mythology and monuments of ancient Athens.

LYONS: Harrison?

THOMPSON: Jane Harrison, yes. She belonged to a small group of Cambridge scholars. That was a very important book and very characteristic of its period, and it's still valuable. I have my own copy of it of course and I keep it within easy reach. It was an enormously stimulating book. She of course was very close to Frazer. Some excellent work was done on that group of Cambridge scholars by a young man



who started at Columbia University, who is still alive. I had quite a correspondence with him. As a matter of fact we had him here for a term years ago. I've lost touch with him, but he did an excellent book on that Cambridge group. Yes, there was a good deal of interest in my earliest years on that aspect of culture.

SMITH: This was a period more generally speaking when perhaps people outside of the classical field came to understand the degree to which Greece had strong irrational elements in its culture, and yet at the same time the neoclassicist image of Greece was the purity and extreme rationality and the kind of archetype. Was the conflict between the Dionysian Greece and the Apollonian Greece something that was an area of tension within the Hellenistic studies community?

THOMPSON: Oh very much so, yes. Even the archaeologists had to be affected by it.

SMITH: Even the archaeologists?

THOMPSON: Inevitably, yes. One of the principal scholars working in that area was E. R. Dodds. We had him here one year as a visiting member—a very stimulating person, both in conversation and in his writing. He was a man of wide interests. I remember his telling us how at a certain time in his life he wanted a change of jobs and he found that there were two jobs going in Oxford, one was the Regius Professorship of Greek and the other was head gardenership of the gardens of St. John's College in Oxford. He hesitated for a long time, he said, trying to decide





which job he should pursue. [laughter] He eventually put in for the Regius Professorship and got it, but he was mollified because the college made accessible to him as a place to live a house that had been occupied by Cromwell during the Civil War; it was set in an enormous garden, so he lived happily there forever after. But he was one of the leaders in that sort of discussion.

SMITH: Did you have any interest in the theories of Freud or of Jung?

THOMPSON: No, I simply haven't read enough to have developed any deep interest, in spite of the fact that one of our old associates in the Agora, a volunteer, had a special connection with Freud and worked with him for a time. But the importance and interest of his work were known to us only in a very secondhand way.

SMITH: But it didn't seem relevant to the questions at hand?

THOMPSON: Well, it didn't seem relevant to me.

SMITH: You said before that even archaeologists had to be influenced by this Dionysian-Apollonian tension, and I wonder more precisely what you mean, but then also why you used that adverb "even." [laughter]

THOMPSON: Well, in earlier times they didn't feel the need to pay much attention to such thoughts, but as the study of Greek vase painting became more active and people learned to read more and more out of Greek vase paintings, it was then that archaeologists, especially the pot people who were interested primarily in Greek vases, just had to concern themselves with these matters, because much of the



firsthand evidence comes from the vase paintings. And that is still true. Beazley, the supreme "cataloger," knew all about it, but he seldom expanded his inspired catalog entries. He made the material available, and he understood what it was all about and had his own ideas, but they have been put down on paper largely by some of his followers, notably Martin Robertson.

SMITH: I suppose some of the subjects of the vase paintings violated certainly the then standards of decency and the standards of what's now been called the genteel tradition, of the late-Victorian, Edwardian way of thinking. Did that cause problems in the expedition about whether one should publicize those kinds of findings?

THOMPSON: Our people weren't much bothered by it. There were many vase paintings that by our standards would be called pornographic, but they were far more interesting for their artistic quality than for their pornographic implications. That is true in general I think of the Greek treatment of this aspect of life. It's amazing how many very sober modern scholars have dealt with this theme. I shouldn't say their primary interest was in the aesthetic beauty of the drawings, but I think most people feel that way about it. But with the more comprehensive study and apprehension of the significance of Greek vase painting there has developed an increased interest in this aspect of their culture. Of course it's really astonishing the amount of evidence available for that aspect of life in ancient Greece. I don't know in what other culture you have so much firsthand information.



SMITH: I wanted to get more into detail now about your coming to the Agora project. You mentioned that you were pushed into it, or the doors were opened for you by your mentor at Michigan, and I wonder if you could go into a little bit more about how, out of all the possible numbers of people who could have gone from the U.S. to Athens to work on this project, you were one of the first two who were selected. Was there a competition of any sort?

THOMPSON: No, this was in the old days when such things were much simpler. I don't think it was the action of a committee at all. It was probably done very simply by a recommendation from Benjamin Meritt, under whom I had read Thucydides at Michigan. He was well known to the leading classicist at Princeton University at the time, Professor Edward Capps. Capps at that time was the chairman of the Managing Committee of the American School. I think that connection was enough to bring about my appointment.

SMITH: And you originally came for three years? Was your intention then to come back to North America and teach?

THOMPSON: Yes, and it worked out that way, actually. In my third year at the Agora, or perhaps late in the second, I was approached by the senior ancient historian in the University of Toronto, where they were looking for a young man in classics. The appointment would be also in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology in Toronto—in those days it was a dual appointment. I made it clear to him that though





I was legally committed to the Agora for only three years, I enjoyed the work in Athens and looked forward to the prospect of further participation. In short, I wanted to maintain a connection with the American School at Athens and with the Agora excavations. He said they would be prepared to give me half-time leave; that is, enable me to spend half the year in Toronto teaching in the university and curating in the museum, and I could spend the other half year in Athens. That seemed too good an offer to turn down. Again the salary, at the level of an assistant professorship, was princely by standards of those days—\$2800.

SMITH: Actually, that's quite good. That's more than what people were making at Harvard and Yale at that time in a comparable entry-level position.

THOMPSON: Well, those were the good old days. As I've said, I had been getting along on \$1500 a year on the Agora fellowship, which enabled me to live comfortably in Athens and do a certain amount of traveling in Europe. So that appointment went through, and from then on until I left, in 1947, I held the professional appointment at the University of Toronto, which included a curatorship in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology.

SMITH: I want to talk about Toronto a little bit, but since we've gotten you to Athens now, let's stay there. Could you give me a little character portrait of T. Leslie Shear, Sr. He seems to have been an extremely effective organizer. What were his attributes that made him as effective as the reports seem to indicate?



THOMPSON: I think he was well suited and well qualified for this job. Again, I suspect the actual appointment came about in a simple direct way. He was well known to Professor Edward Capps, but he was also widely known for his own work in the field. He had done excavations in Asia Minor, at Cnidus in 1911, and at Sardis in 1922, and since 1925 he had been doing great things at Corinth. His principal achievement there was the excavation of the theater, which had been worked on at various times, but it is to Shear that we owe the total excavation of the great building.

Another important thing he did at Corinth is illustrated by that watercolor up on the wall of my office. That's an actual plan of a large suburban villa into the rooms of which mosaics had been inserted. It's probably of the second century A.D. and contains one of the best preserved suites of mosaic floors that we have in Greece. As you know, Greece in general is rather poor in mosaics as compared with Turkey. The building was excavated by Shear and dated by him to the Hellenistic period. In the light of more recent research the true date is probably second century A. D. The villa and the mosaics need to be restudied, but the excavator brought out a splendid folio volume: a fairly brief text, but a magnificent set of illustrations. His first wife was a good artist and she worked closely with him. He had also published a number of articles, was interested in sculpture, and was an effective teacher here at Princeton University.

Shear was good as an organizer. Fred Waage, my fellow neophyte, and I



worked on his staff for one season in Corinth—in the spring of 1930, when we were comparatively free before fieldwork had begun in the Agora. The site at Corinth was just outside the ancient city walls. We dug chiefly in chamber tombs of the Roman period—that was our lower limit. The upper limit was a household well of the Middle Helladic period, second millennium B.C., which yielded a great deal of well preserved and fine pottery of the period, plus seventeen complete skeletons. That was quite an introduction to the Bronze Age. The yield from the well proved to be one of the most interesting deposits or groups of material of that period known in Greece.

The senior Shear had also done a lot of work in one of the extensive pre-Roman cemeteries of ancient Corinth: the so-called North Cemetery that had been in use through most of the classical period. At that time, his first wife having died, he had taken as his second wife Josephine Shear, who had been a very valuable assistant to him. She was a great cataloger and a very systematic person in everything she did. It was in Corinth that the two Shears established standards for recording objects in an excavation, and they brought those standards with them to the Agora.

Shear was a fairly rich man—another useful attribute for work in archaeology. Among other things it enabled him to contribute very generously to supporting the costs of the extensive excavations that he carried out at Corinth under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies. He was a very outgoing person, had very





easy relations with his staff, and could tolerate differences of opinion.

Professor Shear normally wrote a season's report on the Agora excavations that appeared in print in the School's journal *Hesperia*. But after five seasons of excavation in the course of which we had cleared a number of ancient structures on the west side of the Agora, he asked me to do a comprehensive report on this series of buildings that we now know as the Tholos, the Metroon, the Bouleuterion, the Temple of Apollo Patroos, and the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios. My article appeared in the 1937 volume of *Hesperia*. My interpretation of the evidence for the identification and dating of several of these buildings was rather different from Shear's, but he tolerated the publication of my variant interpretations. He had indicated his preliminary opinion, but he was perfectly ready to see it adjusted in the light of fuller knowledge. That was characteristic of Shear and, in my opinion, greatly to his credit. Later, as the excavation proceeded, I had to adjust my views about those same buildings.

Ms. Josephine Shear assumed responsibility for the coins that came out of the excavation. She worked hard on the cleaning of the freshly excavated coins, which was done at first by the primitive means of washbasin and water. Later the bronze coins, a great majority of the total, were put through a more sophisticated and gentler electrolyte process introduced in Athens for the first time by the Shears. This was a great advance, because we were finding coins by the thousands and most of them





were in a miserable state. Ms. Shear did a first identification and published the first report on our coins. She had hoped to do more comprehensive studies later on but her career was cut short by her early death.

[Among the several junior scholars who had assisted Josephine Shear in the initial treatment of the coins, one attained special distinction. This was Miss Margaret Thompson. She succeeded to the direction of the Coin Department and it fell to her lot to publish the first volume in the series planned for the numismatic finds from the Agora. This volume comprised the coins of Roman imperial and Byzantine mints. After leaving the Agora, Miss Thompson became a member of the staff of the American Numismatic Society in New York, where she rose to the curatorship of Greek coins and achieved international eminence in the numismatic field.]

SMITH: Did Shear have any negative characteristics that you can recall?

THOMPSON: Well, he was no great scholar himself, witness his opinion of these mosaics in the villa at Corinth. Even at that time he should have realized that they were of the Roman period rather than the Hellenistic. He was also taken in, I'm afraid, in his purchase of some ancient marbles that have gone to Princeton University. They have been published recently in a volume on the sculptures of the Greek period, and the editors very tactfully indicate that modern opinion would regard these as modern works rather than ancient: an embarrassment experienced by many a good scholar. But I would say that Shear was a good choice as first director



of the Agora excavation. He got along well with the Greeks, and that was very important, especially in the initial stages.

He was on very good terms with the leading figure in the running of the American School at that time, Professor Edward Capps, the chairman of the Managing Committee. He was not on such good terms with the director, Rhys Carpenter. There was a great tendency on the part of Leslie Shear and the Agora excavation under his direction to stand rather aloof from the central body of the School, to claim a certain amount of independence. Whereas I think we all feel that from the beginning the Agora excavation should have been regarded as just one of several departments in the makeup of the School and its program.

SMITH: It sounds, from the portrait you are painting, as Shear was more an amateur scholar rather than a trained classicist, such as you and Professor Capps, or certainly Carpenter. Is that accurate? Did he have a Ph.D.?

THOMPSON: Yes, he did, but you are quite right. He was in the old and strong tradition in the field of classical archaeology—a wealthy man, and to some extent an amateur in the field. Yes, he followed right on in the nineteenth-century tradition.

SMITH: Now, you arrived with your Ph.D. in hand, but no actual practical experience in archaeology. How did he go about training you? What were the steps in the process of introducing you to this craft that you had to get involved with?

THOMPSON: Well, there wasn't much of that in our relationship. I watched what



other people were doing, and wherever I could I improved upon it. No, I'm afraid for better or worse I'm largely self-taught in this matter.

SMITH: So there was no sense of moving up the steps of a ladder from knowing nothing to becoming assistant director for the excavation by 1934.

THOMPSON: No, undoubtedly there should have been more formal instruction of the staff, but there just wasn't. We could see what was going on at Corinth, where they had been excavating already for a very long time, for over thirty-five years, and we kept closely in touch with our German colleagues at the Dipylon. They were doing splendid work on the technical side as well as on the scholarly side. They were very systematic in their excavations, especially of tombs but of other material also. That has been one of the pleasant aspects of work in the Agora. We have enjoyed good relations with colleagues of various nationalities working in Athens, above all of course with the Greeks, but also with the Germans working in the Kerameikos, with the British, the French, and, more recently, with the Scandinavians.

SMITH: When did you become assistant director? What were the magic moments that allowed you to become a permanent part of this Agora expedition?

THOMPSON: I don't remember. Nothing was made of it at the time. [laughter]  
You might try and find some reference to that in the history of the School.

SMITH: I did, but one day you're just a fellow, and in the next year's report you're the assistant director. Maybe there was no real change, except—





THOMPSON: I really wasn't aware of it. [It may be that the administration of the American School had been favorably impressed by what I had done in my first few years as a member. I had shown some enterprise in initiating the exploration of the assembly place on the Pnyx. In addition to supervising fieldwork in the Agora for half of each year I had maintained my academic position in the University of Toronto, where I had taken an active part in the organization of the Department of Art and Archaeology. In publication I had produced a substantial article on the assembly place on the Pnyx, and another on the pottery of the Hellenistic period found in the Agora. Both articles are still "required reading" for the serious student of ancient Athens.]

In the matter of archaeological digging technique, we were fortunate in our chief foreman of the Agora. Shear had brought up from Corinth a villager who had served as his foreman there, especially in digging tombs, but also in excavating the theater. He was a very intelligent man who had developed a technique largely on his own. For all the actual manual aspects of field archaeology he had already developed a very satisfactory technique, which we just accepted.

SMITH: Was this Sophokles Lekkas?

THOMPSON: Yes. He was a Corinthian, with many years of experience, and we were very fortunate in having his devoted service for many years.

SMITH: Was he academically trained?



THOMPSON: Not at all. He had been a workman, a villager. He came from one of the leading families of Corinth. We also for a time had his brother Evangelos, who was not quite the person that Sophokles was. Sophokles Lekkas was a friendly person. He was always eager to get our opinion of something that had come to light in the excavation, whether it was an object or a development in the knowledge of a particular building on which we were working. It was always fun to hear him explain to visitors about the history or the date or the significance of a recent discovery. Throughout the years of World War II he and his wife lived in the old excavation house. We had saved a cluster of houses to serve as a temporary museum, offices, and storerooms. The Lekkas family was able to keep a few chickens and to raise vegetables, and we owe a great deal to them for looking after the property during the war years (1940–1945), which was really very important.

SMITH: Now, you arrived two years approximately before the excavation begins, so you were in on the ground floor of the planning, I would assume.

THOMPSON: Yes.

SMITH: What were the assumptions about what would be found and the resources needed to do the job properly, and how accurate did those initial assumptions and the planning around them prove to be?

THOMPSON: Our knowledge of the site was really very skimpy before we began. I don't know how much you've looked into it, but there are plenty of photographs here



to illustrate it. I should say that this was one of the great things Shear did in the early days. He got a systematic photographic record of the whole area, not only general views but street views and views of individual houses, and those are here in these cabinets. That was really very important and will be much used I hope by the person who is now working on the later periods of the Athenian Agora; that is, the Byzantine, the Turkish, and the modern. We've got to pay attention to that because it has meant so much to the Athenians of our time. I've always been just a little anxious when I meet someone who claims to have lived in a house in the area of the ancient Agora, because it almost always turns out that it was a house that we pulled down. But we encountered remarkably little resistance.

As I look back on it now, it seems to me very remarkable that we were allowed to remove such a large residential area from the heart of the old city of Athens at a time when there was a very severe shortage of housing in the city. It does seem strange and always has seemed strange to me. You see, the Greek government from immediately after the Greek War of Independence decided that some day the area of the ancient city, in a broad zone around the Acropolis, should be excavated. So they established an archaeological area around the Acropolis and they held to that decision very firmly through all the years, until our time. In the beginning the Greeks had thought at one time to excavate this area themselves, and they had worked there off and on repeatedly through much of the nineteenth century, although it was



included in the reserved zone, which they regarded as part of the "city of Theseus." Also, the Germans had had a go at the area, especially along the west and the southwest sides of what we now know as the Agora, but very little else was known.

[Tape II, Side Two]

THOMPSON: The Smyrna Disaster of 1922 figured prominently in the history of the Agora excavations because it led to an influx of over a million Greeks coming from Asia Minor into old Greece at a time when the Turkish residents in Northern Greece were sent back to Turkey. A large proportion of Greeks who came back to old Greece settled in and around Athens, and that resulted in a severe housing shortage. But according to Greek law at this time, which had been observed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was forbidden to erect new buildings in this area in which we were interested, or even to extensively renovate existing buildings. Well, the property owners began to chafe at this. They said, "This is quite unfair. You must either allow us to improve our property or get on with the excavation yourselves." The Greeks were not in a position then to undertake the excavation on the scale that was required, and so instead of being a dog in the manger about it they offered it to one of the foreign schools. The Germans and the Swedes showed some interest, but it was the American School that was able to come up with a definite offer, thanks to an understanding with Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., about the financing.





The Greeks accepted our undertaking to carry out the excavation of this very sizable area that was outlined at that time, on condition that we pay for the property. We were not, however, to regard it as American property; it was to be the property of the Greek state—public property. Everything found in this excavation was to be kept in Greece, a museum was to be provided for its housing, and the area was to be landscaped. Those were the principal items in the agreement. It was written into the original agreement that we should be allowed to negotiate with the original property owners about the purchase of their property. If we could come to an agreement, fine, we could go right ahead. If we could not come to an agreement then the matter would go before an Athenian court, which would have final say, and that was the principle on which we worked throughout.

I'm glad to say that we very seldom had to go to court, but occasionally, when we did, we were extremely fortunate in having as general secretary and business manager for the Agora excavations a man by the name of [Anastasios] Adossides. He was not a lawyer, but he had a good understanding of the law. He had also a good understanding of Greek politics; he had been a staunch supporter of [Eleutherios] Venizelos. As it happened, he was free at the time to serve us. He gave us his full time and that was a very happy relationship. He was a Greek gentleman—*kalos kai agathos* at his best.

It soon became clear to the property owners that they might better deal with



the American School straight off and directly rather than haggle with them over the price and get into difficulties with the courts. As a result of some of the earliest transactions, they realized that we were prepared to pay a fair price, more than perhaps they could have expected from the Greek government, and that they could be sure of fairly prompt payment, and this made them willing to come forward and offer their property.

In the early stages the Greeks didn't know where our money came from, but when it became known that we were being helped generously by Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., that made Mr. Adossides' task more difficult. But he managed marvelously well. There were certain memorable cases. I remember for instance one property that eventually was shown to have overlain the ruins of a seventeenth-century church, and the church had overlain the ruins of an ancient public library at the southeast corner of the Agora. A pair of sisters owned the property and Mr. Adossides had negotiated with them. He had persuaded one sister to agree to a sale of the property—they held it jointly. Then when he was sitting with us at tea in the excavation house one afternoon, the foreman came in bringing the dramatic news that one of the sisters had fallen down a well in their garden and was drowned. Mr. Adossides immediately asked, "Which sister?" The foreman told him the name of the sister and Mr. Adossides threw up his hands: "The wrong one!" [laughter] But, nevertheless, he was able to persuade the other to sell the property at a reasonable



price.

Another case I remember vividly: the property was owned by no less than eight people, and they held out jointly against the sale of the house. Well, it happened fortunately that we were able to acquire on fairly satisfactory terms the houses all around their property, so their property became inaccessible, and they were soon prepared to sell it. But I should say that in the beginning, if people were prepared to surrender their property in this area, we were prepared to build new houses for them in the outskirts of Athens at the time. Whole suburbs were going up to accommodate the refugees, but being Greeks, they preferred to take the money and do their own new building.

This is a very important aspect of the Agora excavations—I mean the possibility of continuous excavation over a large area. It was only in this way that we could have hoped to recover the history and the form of the Agora. You see, the Greeks and the Germans had been working for generations in small areas made available by the demolition of a house or something of the sort, and they had come on a number of ancient buildings, but they couldn't get the complete plan of any one of these buildings; nor could they establish the relationship of this building to the next building, and they were getting nowhere. And really, as I look back, it was this complete coverage that enabled us to get on with the job. That is, within a lifetime, say. Otherwise it might have dragged on for centuries.





SMITH: Really? But you did have the cooperation of the Greek government in terms of clearing the land.

THOMPSON: Yes, we did. And they respected our original agreement throughout, under all the many successive Greek governments under which we have worked.

SMITH: So, did the timing of the excavation go as planned? It actually sounds from reading [Louis Eleazer] Lord's book [*A History of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1882–1942*] as if Shear expected to complete the excavation of the Agora in ten to fifteen years, and if the war had not intervened the project would have been wrapped up by 1945 at the latest.

THOMPSON: Yes, it does seem almost funny now. I don't know what prompted him to say that, or even to write it. No, he hadn't realized the nature of the excavation, really. In the areas in which he had worked previously things were much simpler—notably in Sardis and in Corinth. But, no, the whole operation turned out to be much more complex and much more difficult and time-consuming than he estimated in the beginning. I must say our donors were remarkably understanding in this matter, and that has been a great source of satisfaction to us from the start. The generosity of successive donors . . . well, you've read about it, but we owe a great deal to the Rockefellers: Mr John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Mr Rockefeller himself was influenced, I believe, in large part by his earlier experience at Williamsburg in both the exploration and the



reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos.

SMITH: Which comes later, of course. At this period, in the thirties, were you at all personally involved in the fund-raising?

THOMPSON: No. Messrs. Shear and Capps attended to that. No, we junior members of the staff were blissfully uninvolved. [laughter] And that was another of the great qualities of Messrs. Shear and Capps. They enjoyed doing this, raising money. They accepted the responsibility and they did it very well. Shear could present the results of each successive excavation in a very lively manner—he spoke well to a general audience, and Capps was a very impressive figure. We came to know something of the family. They were closely connected with Greece of course. He had been, not ambassador, because there was no ambassador at the time, but an American minister to Greece, so he knew modern Greece and modern Greeks well, and his daughter got involved with helping the refugees from the Smyrna Disaster of 1922 and organized handicraft work among the women. At one time she had no less than three hundred Greek women doing handicrafts—embroidery and weaving and so on—making things suitable to the tourist trade. She was a very able person too and managed the business side very well, so the name of Capps carried real weight in Greece, and that helped our enterprise very much.

SMITH: You've talked a little bit about the American School, and you said you had fairly close contacts with the German Archaeological Institute people. Who were the



people in the German Institute that you were most interacting with?

THOMPSON: We used to see something of Professor Ernst Buschor, of Munich, who regularly passed through Athens on his way to the German excavations on Samos. He often gave a lecture or two at the German Institute, and the members of the American School—including the Agora—were invited. And then in the Kerameikos, the man who was in charge for many years was Karl Kübler, who was responsible for the excavation of many of the large cemeteries that they had found there, of the Protogeometric and Geometric periods especially. He was an excellent excavator and a good publisher. His work was extremely important. We too had been finding tombs of the Protogeometric and Geometric periods, but they had found far, far more, and so we profited by access to their material in the study of our own.

Most recently, a young lady scholar has been in charge there. There's a copy of the guidebook that she wrote, bringing one up to date on the work at the Dipylon. Her name's gone from me. I know her well. But she's been very cordial, and one after another of the people who are doing volumes in the Agora series go to the Dipylon and have ready access to their finds and they can talk freely with the person in charge of the excavations.

SMITH: Again, going back to the pre-World War II period, of the 1930s, how would you distinguish the German approach to archaeology from the American approach at that time. Do you think there were significant differences and



assumptions and methodologies?

THOMPSON: No, I wouldn't say so. They had been at it far longer than the Americans. They had been doing great things, especially at Olympia of course, since the 1870s. That was the real beginning of modern archaeology in Greek lands. And then they had done so much already in the closing years of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century over in Asia Minor—at Pergamon and Miletus, and above all at Priene. We have always looked upon the excavation and the study of Priene as a sort of role model for the exploration of a civic site, with emphasis on the civic center, the agora. There at Priene the buildings are reasonably complete. More remains of them than remains of most of our buildings. They were well excavated and beautifully presented, at various levels in big thick volumes of a scholarly sort, and then smaller guidebooks which have been kept up to date in successive editions. In all these respects they were an inspiring model for us. This was in addition to their expertise in actual fieldwork and so on. No, in Greek lands the Germans were certainly the leaders.

We have seen a fair amount of the French, also. After all, they had started work at Delphi in the 1880s and on Delos about the same time. They, too, have been cordial, but it just happens that we in the Agora didn't have as much contact with them as we had with the Germans. But we had very good relations with successive directors of the French School. We've profited from exchanging views and notes





about procedure and excavation, interpretation and presentation.

SMITH: What about the British School?

THOMPSON: Yes, we've had good relations with the British also, especially after World War II, when we were able to return to the Agora and get going again in the summer of 1946. The British School was rather slower in resuming their programs, and they simply didn't have the money to do much in the way of fieldwork or even publication, so a number of young English scholars in the immediately postwar years came to us to find useful things and interesting things to do, and this was enormously helpful to us. I'm thinking in particular about the cooperation we got from a man by the name of Brian Sparkes. He was interested in pottery primarily, and he worked with one of our people whom I've mentioned already, Lucy Talcott, in doing a book that's become the standard work on the plain and black-glazed pottery of the sixth to the fourth centuries, B.C. We had a tremendous quantity of this material, much of which came from a useful context. It was much the most abundant of all varieties of Greek pottery, and yet had received comparatively little attention.

Well, these two very intelligent people had worked hand in glove. It was a beautiful case of collaboration, and they produced this two-volume book in the Agora series that has proven very useful to people all around the Mediterranean, because much of this pottery was exported from Athens for centuries—the fifth, and especially the fourth century A.D. We have better evidence for the dating and have established



a more precise chronology for it than anyone else has been able to do, because of circumstances. That is one example.

Another example is the collaboration that we had with R. E. Wycherley, a University of Manchester graduate who went to Clare College in Cambridge, and then for much of his life was professor of archaeology at the University of North Wales, at Bangor. He was very good on the literary side. He started life as a literary scholar, but he had always been interested in Athens, and he knew the literature on ancient Athens—he had that down cold. So I invited him to prepare a collection of the ancient literary and epigraphic testimonia on history, cults, political institutions, and commercial activities associated with the Agora. Well, he gladly agreed to do that, and he put together what again has been an extremely useful book. [Agora series, vol. III: *Literary and Epigraphical Testimonia* (1957)] You have all the testimonia in the original Greek or Latin, together with a good, up-to-date English translation. There are over seven hundred entries in that book and it has been useful to everybody: to members of the excavation staff, who apply these ancient testimonia to the study of individual monuments, and to the rest of the world.

Then Wycherley worked with me on another volume in the Agora series, vol. XIV: *The Agora of Athens* (1972), in which we pulled together the results of the excavation in combination with the ancient literary and epigraphic evidence in doing a study of the results of the excavation by type of monument: the sanctuaries, the civic



buildings, the private houses, the workshops, and so on. That has been supplemented brilliantly quite recently by a younger man, John Camp, who has done a book *The Athenian Agora*, which was published commercially by a good English firm. He treats the subject historically. So these two books have quite different approaches which give any intelligent reader, whether he knows his Greek and Latin or not, access to the results of the excavation.

SMITH: Did the foreign archaeologists in Athens form a larger community of people working on classical studies, so that you interacted with each other according to your subject matter interests rather than nationality?

THOMPSON: Yes, though that has developed more at the American School in more recent times. There's far more of it going on now than in my first years in Athens.

SMITH: So in the first years, then, the Americans were somewhat to themselves?

THOMPSON: Yes, they worked closely with the English, because the buildings of the two schools, as you know, are side by side, but nowadays this is due in large part to the personalities and the policies of the successive directors in recent times. So there are now far more frequent get-togethers of many, many sorts.

SMITH: I notice that in the early 1930s there was a debate within the American School over whether Canadians should be admitted as fellows. This occupied several years of the bulletins. And of course you were already there. I don't know if because you came from Michigan you were not considered to be Canadian or something, but





there were people coming directly from Canadian universities and [there was a question as to] whether that would be acceptable or not.

THOMPSON: Yes, well, a tendency to be at least binational in matters archaeological is induced by the setup in the Archaeological Institute of America [AIA]. There, "America" doesn't mean the U.S.A.; it means this continent. It has reached the point where the president of the Archaeological Institute of America—the present one—is a Canadian, and is still teaching at a Canadian university. So it was natural that this same point of view should influence the policy of the American School of Classical Studies, which was in fact an offspring of the AIA. Somewhat the same problem arose in connection with the relationship between the British School and Canadian students. That again would have seemed a natural place for Canadian students to turn to the British School, and they did to some extent in the early days, but there was more inclination on the part of Canadian students to apply to the American School.

There exists, as you probably know, a Canadian Institute of Mediterranean Studies. This has been, until very recently, an umbrella organization covering three actual institutes: one in Athens, one in Rome, and one in Cairo. But this has not been a great success insofar as Athens is concerned. It got off to a very promising start; a man of means and culture took a very serious interest in it. He hoped that it would attract the support of Canadian universities and Canadian individuals, perhaps even



commercial people, as a broadly cultural institution comparable with what the Scandinavian countries have developed. Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and now Finland each has an institute of archaeology in Athens. Well, it was high time, many people thought, that Canada should have an institute. But most of the Canadian universities with an interest in classical archaeology had already developed special relationships with the American School, and the resources of the American School were more ample, especially in the matter of the library, than any Canadian institute in Athens could hope to offer for a long time to come. So there has been no great enthusiasm on the part of Canadian universities for the idea of an overall Canadian institute of archaeology in Athens.

The latest information that I have is that it may be possible to salvage and to retain a very low key and low level central body, perhaps called the Canadian Institute of Mediterranean Archaeology, or something like that, but the initiative in all matters, and the funding should be assumed by the institutes of archaeology that still exist in Athens, Rome and Cairo; they should regard themselves as independent and develop as they find it possible to develop, each in its own country and setting. It is a difficult matter, and it's been very embarrassing to a number of prominent people, who are genuinely interested in our field. I don't know how it will work out, but I talked to one after another of the Canadian scholars who come to this place—we've had a good many scholars here at the Institute for Advanced Study working in our field—and I



find that they have had great difficulty in persuading their deans and their financial people to go on supporting both the American School of Classical Studies at Athens and the Canadian Institute of Mediterranean Archaeology. I'm afraid that is all I can say on the subject now, because it is in a state of great confusion.

SMITH: Of course, ultimately, the American School agreed that they should admit Canadians, but I wanted to ask you about another issue that arose in the thirties. Was there a change in the relationship between the American School and the German School after the Nazis took over Germany?

THOMPSON: Not much, no. We didn't have much to do with the Germans during the war. They were much more considerate of the ancient monuments than they were of the contemporary people of Greece.

SMITH: But before the war, from 1933 to 1939?

THOMPSON: No, that didn't much affect our relations.

SMITH: Did a new director come in who was a Nazi?

THOMPSON: Well, [Georg Heinrich] Karo was brought in as director. He was a man of Jewish origin, but he was made an honorary Aryan by the Hitler government. The German Institute in Athens felt they needed a new building. The one then used and the one still used is in the middle of the city, in a very noisy place; it's very central and readily accessible, but it doesn't permit enlargement and it has many drawbacks. So just before the war they were planning a new building on a new site. The plans



had been drawn in Athens and were sent to Germany, and I was told by Dr. Georg Karo himself that they had reached the desk of the *Führer*, who had to authorize such matters personally; he was always interested in architecture. But they arrived just as the situation in Europe was becoming critical and he didn't have time to do his final checking or to give his approval, and that was never revived. Karo came to this country, to the University of Cincinnati, and spent the war years there.

SMITH: Was there competition between the schools for sites? How did you resolve who got to do what, or was it just money?

THOMPSON: It was largely money. You see, long, long ago the Germans had taken possession of Olympia, so to speak. They were recognized as the one foreign school that should have precedence at Olympia. The same applied to the French at Delphi and Delos, and the English had worked early at Sparta and throughout Laconia, so they were consulted before anyone else was allowed to work there—allowed by the Greek authorities that is. And especially because our great people, Dinsmoor and Hill and Stevens, had shown such an interest in Athenian monuments, notably the Acropolis, they too had a sort of "in" in the matter of archaeology and archaeological enterprise in Athens. The Greeks had done a lot in the area of the ancient Agora, as bits of property became available throughout the nineteenth century. Some of it had important results, notably in the Stoa of Attalos, but it gave us very few leads as to the overall history or scheme of the Agora.





The Germans also had done a fair amount of excavation in the Agora, and after the Smyrna Disaster the Swedes took some interest, but they withdrew when they came to estimate the cost of the enterprise. They felt that they just didn't have the financial resources, so they withdrew, although . They had been urged, I was told, by the venerable Wilhelm Dörpfeld to make an offer. We've had very cordial relations with the Swedes, especially since the founding of the Swedish Institute in 1948. So there wasn't much competition for sites.

As for the lesser sites, each school is limited to a maximum of three excavations at any one time. I think that's a good rule, because far too many sites were being excavated but not published, and I think the Greeks were fully justified in insisting on this limitation. One aspect of the relationship between the American School and the Canadian Institute was that it would give the Canadian organization three sites. That would double the sites available to North American archaeologists. Otherwise, no, there's been no significant bitterness or rivalry about choice of sites. It becomes a problem at times for the Greeks, but not often.

SMITH: Okay. That's basically what I was curious about. I think we should stop now and we'll resume tomorrow.



SESSION TWO: 8 OCTOBER, 1994

[Tape III, Side One]

LYONS: We left off yesterday talking about the period of the thirties and also the Second World War, but I was curious to talk more about some of the directors of the other national schools: the French, the Italian—was the Italian school already established?

THOMPSON: Yes, oh yes, it's one of the older schools, founded in 1908.

LYONS: Could you talk about some of the personalities that you might have known or worked with at some of those other schools during that time?

THOMPSON: Well, I didn't have much association with the German directors at that time. I might mention one incident of some interest. Dr. Wilhelm Dörpfeld was the "great old man," one of the greatest figures in the field. Dörpfeld had done so much in Athens and elsewhere on the Greek theater and on many other aspects of Greek architecture, and he was then inveigled by [Heinrich] Schliemann to go to Troy, and that meant that the excavations on the Acropolis at Athens in the 1980s could profit less from his attention, and that made quite a difference to the history of our knowledge of the Acropolis. Dörpfeld continued to be actively interested in archaeology until his latest years. I had finished my preliminary account of the buildings on the west side of the Agora; it appeared in *Hesperia* just as the war was breaking out. I sent him a copy of it because it had to do with the identification and



the publication of a couple of buildings with which he had been concerned a way back.

SMITH: This was your publication on the Tholos?

THOMPSON: No, on the more northerly part of the west side of the Agora.

Dörpfeld had come on the foundations of a building, which he identified in a very loose and general way from the evidence of Pausanias's reference. We had completed the excavation of that building and the neighboring buildings and had found out that it couldn't possibly be the Royal Stoa, as he had insisted, but rather the Temple of Apollo Patroos. I pointed this out in my article. Well, I got a response from him after the outbreak of war. It was a long and almost cordial letter acknowledging the receipt of my study. But then he went on to defend his own old ideas. He'd have none of our new ideas about the identification of these buildings in spite of the fact that we had conclusive evidence that he was wrong there.

It was a great privilege to have known that man at firsthand, even in his latest years. He visited the Agora excavations several times. His sight was pretty dim by then. He could spot a good and interesting ancient block at a distance, but to make sure of the quality of the workmanship, the cuttings and so on, he would ask that I take his hand to run over the block. He would feel it, and he would pronounce on the state of the evidence: the dim evidence of his eyes and the sure evidence of his fingers. [laughter] Well, he was a marvelous man, and of course in my earlier years





in Athens he was still lecturing. At intervals he would lead groups around Athens and he knew every building and every block. He was just as marvelously clear in his oral exposition as he always was in his writing, and he made a great impact on the archaeology of Athens at that time and on the young scholars of all the schools in Athens.

As for the other schools, I saw most, perhaps, the director of the Italian school, who was another very remarkable man. He spent the war years here in Princeton, as a visiting member of the Institute for Advanced Study, and here he had done his great work on the mosaics of Antioch. So he had very cordial feelings toward this country and toward American scholars in general, and that led to a rather closer rapport between the two schools. As a regular course in the program of the Italian school, he would bring his students of the year over to the Agora excavations and do the round himself or ask me to talk to his students. In that way we kept quite closely in touch.

At the French School in those early years the director was Georges Daux, who was a very friendly person with a very, very acute mind and multiple interests. In our field, he knew his literature thoroughly well, his ancient history, and he was a very good epigraphist. He knew the inscriptions of Delos of course, almost by heart, and the inscriptions of Delphi, and he knew the Attic inscriptions also very well, so that he was a very good coordinator, especially on the epigraphic side, because they are all



closely related. He wrote his regular reports on the progress of archaeology in Greece in the *BCH* [*Bulletin de Correspondance Hellenique*]. His wife was of Yugoslav origin and passionately interested in sports, especially winter sports—skiing and the like—and they spent their holidays frequently in Yugoslavia. They were a very nice couple and they added a lot to our little community. He was in Greece for many years, and he was a very prominent figure in our community life there.

LYONS: Had the excavations on Thasos begun?

THOMPSON: Yes, they had begun. I got up there a couple of times while they were still active on Thasos. Yes, there had been very close connections between Athens and Thasos at one time, and we were interested in seeing how the archaeological evidence corresponded with the literary evidence. One remarkable link on the archaeological side was provided by one of the most prominent buildings excavated by the French on Thasos, the "Stoa with the Wings," as they called it. As things developed, it became quite clear that this building, dating from the fourth century B.C., had been patterned architecturally on our Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios—a stoa with projecting wings, which was as you know an early form of the stoa. It originated I think with our building in the Agora, where it served a dual purpose of temple and stoa. Then when it came to discussing the uses of these buildings, the French had the most explicit and obvious evidence: the walls of that building were covered with lists of the names of the archons in successive years, and it became quite clear as the



French pointed out, that this must have been the headquarters of the archons in Thasos. Well, that made us think again about the use of our building, and you may recall the fragmentary but very beautifully written list of archons' names found early on in our excavations. Fragments of that inscription had been found in front of the Stoa of Zeus, and the evidence pointed to that having been a list of archons engraved in one of the antae of the facade of our building, the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios. And that, combined with a certain amount of literary evidence referring to our building made it pretty clear—and I would regard it now as certain—that our building too had served as the headquarters of the archons of Athens, so that the building in Thasos was indebted to Athens not only for its architectural scheme but also for the use of that building. Well, that came about through a very close coordination of our efforts.

As for the other schools, the British School . . . well, that was taken for granted, as I think I said to you yesterday. [It was a great privilege to have known personally Humfry Payne, perhaps the most brilliant scholar ever to serve as director of the British School and one of the most sensitive students ever of archaic Greek art.] We also saw a lot of the young English archaeologists, especially in the years just after the war, with very happy results. I mentioned I think the name of Lucy Talcott working with Brian Sparkes, and R. E. Wycherley working independently or with me. There was a young man by the name of Richard Nichols, and various personnel—a curator who has been for a long time curator of classical antiquities in



Cambridge—and several others in a less formal way. We saw a good deal also of the founders of the Swedish Institute of Archaeology in Athens.

LYONS: You started to tell me some stories at lunch yesterday concerning the interest of the king of Sweden in your fieldwork. It would be good to talk about that more, also.

THOMPSON: Oh yes, we have said something of the Swedish connection already. The man who founded the Swedish Institute and was its first director, Åke Åkerström, was living at the time very close to where we were living in Athens, and we came to know him quite well personally. From the beginning he rather leaned on the American School, making good use of our library, where he was very welcome. He was very much interested in the civic affairs and the civic architecture of ancient Athens, so he followed our excavations closely. That very warm relationship continued for a long, long time until his death. His daughter was also very much interested in classical antiquities, in the art of late antiquity. She did a splendid article on some of the late antique mosaics of Argos. She's still teaching back in her native town of Göteborg.

LYONS: Where were the Swedish archaeologists excavating at that time?

THOMPSON: They didn't do much excavating in Greece. Åkerström had worked at a little place called Asea down in the Peloponnesus. But he had already done important work on Etruscan tombs and also on the architectural terra-cottas of Asia





Minor. Finally he settled in Athens. He also had a lively interest in Mycenae; that developed a bit later. He began, and carried on for years, an excavation at a site near Mycenae itself, where recently archaeologists have found reason to believe that most of the pottery associated with Mycenae in the late Mycenaean period had been made. He did a great deal of excavating there, and then he worked on the publication for much of his later years. He loved that place also, and spent several months each year down at Nauplia.

Of course we saw the younger members of the Swedish school at the excavations in informal ways. We watched the foundation, subsequently, of a Danish institute in Athens, and now, most recently, a Finnish institute, so that there's been quite a change in the international aspect of Athenian archaeology in the foundation of so many new institutes. Is the Finnish the fourteenth or the fifteenth? Well, it's an indication of the hospitality of our Greek colleagues; they have been generous in allotting excavation permits, so that there's no feeling of a dog-in-the-manger-relationship. This association of scholars of various nationalities has been beneficial all around, because inevitably they look at things differently. There's a fine example of that going on right now in Athens with the symposium on the Pnyx, which I mentioned earlier.

SMITH: Did people work together on digs? Would you have people from the French or the German school coming over to the Agora, or did you send some of



your people out to Olympia?

THOMPSON: No, there has not been much of that. Most of these young English scholars of whom I spoke were not associated with any excavation being conducted by the British School. They came as individual members of the British School. But there was plenty of visiting back and forth, informally.

LYONS: Did Greek students participate in the Agora excavations?

THOMPSON: Yes, we normally had one Greek member on the excavation staff, who represented the Greek department of antiquities in the Agora excavations. That was normal and regular. It's the rule also in Turkey—a very similar arrangement.

LYONS: That's a more senior and professional archaeologist?

THOMPSON: With us it was normally a young man, and he was expected to learn something about field archaeology by association with us. I got off to an unusual beginning in that respect because I collaborated with a very senior and much experienced Greek archaeologist, Dr. Kourouniotis, but that was unusual.

SMITH: I noticed in Lord's book an interesting story that could actually be elaborated more: Rhys Carpenter's identification of the missing figures from the west pediment of the Parthenon. Were you there at the time? It was 1931.

THOMPSON: Yes.

SMITH: Do you recall any of the incidents involved with that?

THOMPSON: Yes, that was a great time to be at the School, because Carpenter was



really a great figure, a brilliant man, with very wide interests in art and literature of all periods, and in music. He was quite a mountaineer; he spent the holidays in the Dolomites. When he got to Athens he soon became involved with the sculptures of the Parthenon pediments and he went at it very thoroughly when he spotted, from its style, the likelihood that that famous seated figure must come from one of the pediments. Before going public about it, he got up onto the cornice of the Parthenon and had the pediment floors very carefully drawn, so he got the setting places of all the figures there, and then of course he did his library work very thoroughly. I think he convinced most people of his identification of the first figure. Then he went on of course to fill out both pediments. This is an appetite that feeds on itself! Some people think he went too far. But one great advance that he made I think was the brilliant exploitation of the Madrid Puteal (marble well head), where you clearly have direct influence from the Parthenon pediments. I think he made more out of that derivative evidence than anyone else had. People have disagreed with some of his identifications and placements, but he really stirred up a very intense scholarly interest in the pedimental sculpture, which had an impact I think even on German scholarship.

It's curious . . . no, it's typical that Carpenter's brilliant work on the pediments should have anteceded the great work done by a German scholar, Frank Brommer, who went systematically over the sculpture of the Parthenon, working on the metopes, the pediments, and the frieze. He did an extremely thorough cataloging of





all these parts of the great sculptural program, and his conclusions appeared in one volume after another. That way he presented the evidence in great detail and with great precision, with very adequate illustration. He had scaffolding erected especially for his photographer. In a way it was a pity that his work had not preceded Carpenter's study, but it happened the other way around. Yet the two supplement each other very nicely. But yes, that was a great period in the history of the study of Periclean sculpture.

SMITH: Did you talk to Carpenter at the time when he was doing this? Was he testing out ideas?

THOMPSON: Yes, that was almost inevitable, yes. Among his contributions to the American School was the founding of its journal, *Hesperia*. The first volume appeared in 1932. It contained Carpenter's first article on the Parthenon sculpture, and also our article on the Pnyx. Strange company, but there they are.

SMITH: I thought it would be interesting to talk about some of the personalities that have been involved in the Agora excavation, some of whom are not necessarily as famous as others, but presumably everyone contributed his or her share. I've got names that I've pulled out from here, there, and everywhere, so I'd just like to throw them out to you and if you could say a little bit about their personalities and their motivations and why were they there and what were they like to work with.

Margaret Crosby was one of the first people there; she was part of the staff from the



beginning.

THOMPSON: Yes, she came to us from Dura. She had worked with the Yale people at Dura-Europos, a Hellenistic settlement on the Euphrates River. She operated somewhat in the nineteenth-century tradition of the well-to-do person who has a sort of gentlemanly interest in archaeology. She was the female counterpart.

SMITH: Was she related to Seymour Crosby?

THOMPSON: No, not to my knowledge. I'm not aware of any connection. Her father had been a member of a great milling company out in Minneapolis. They were people of considerable means. She had an excellent education and had been interested especially, as I remember, in English literature. But she turned to archaeology in middle life. She had done very good work at Dura-Europos, and then she turned up in Athens and worked with us. She did a lot of the supervision of large areas of excavation. She was a good observer and she wrote very good accounts of her work, but she had abominable handwriting, literally abominable, so it was very hard for people using her notebooks just to read them. But she left an invaluable record. She died all too young, but she was a lovely person, and helpful in so many different ways.

Another early member of our staff was Arthur Parsons. You may have also discovered him in reading the history of the School. He too died comparatively young, without having finished his work. He did a couple of excellent articles on his



own work, notably on a famous old fountain house, the Klepsydra, on the northwest slope of the Acropolis, and a water mill of late antiquity on the border of the Agora. But he left a lot of his material un-worked-over. After World War II, something had to be done with the vast amount of pottery that he had left behind, unsorted, but, fortunately, labeled. Margaret Crosby undertook to do this. She went over it all, got it properly sorted, and saw to it that important pieces were cataloged, properly labeled, and put away. This was a big undertaking that required a full season of her time and effort. It was something that she had not been called on to do, but she saw the need of it and did it willingly; that was characteristic of her.

Margaret Crosby's biggest contribution of a scholarly sort to the Agora excavations was her publication of the records of the mining leases at Laurion; that was really a great achievement. It was the Athenian practice, especially in the fourth century B.C., to inscribe on marble the leases of parcels of land at Sounion, known to be silver bearing, to individuals. The terms were fairly standardized, but the concessions were re-leased at intervals, and since there was no regular scheme of official publication on paper, such as we have—the official gazettes and so on—these successive leases were inscribed on marble stelae which were set up so that the public could see them, especially around the Tholos, where there must eventually have been a forest of marble stelai at one time. There they stood for hundreds of years. It's a very interesting example of the way the Athenians handled their public records. We



found hundreds of fragments of these stelai, most of which were pretty badly broken, so it required a great effort to get the fragments assembled. The writing had suffered greatly from long exposure to the elements. In the first place, the letters were very small, and they were just as difficult to read as Margaret's own handwriting, but she researched and published a great number of them. Her original publication, which appeared in 1950, is still the standard work on the records of the leases of the mining property at Sounion—something fundamental to our knowledge of the economy of ancient Athens. Margaret had a good mind for business matters. She had inherited that from her father, I suppose.

SMITH: In our interviews in the art history field with men and women, I've noticed that the women seem much less to be motivated by a desire for fame or public recognition, and more just by a desire to be able to do constructive work and to be recognized by their peers, the people they're working with. Would that be a fair assessment of the gender relationships at the Agora project?

THOMPSON: Yes, it was, in the early days. Of course women had been active in classical archaeology and in prehistoric archaeology in Greek lands already from the beginning of the century, as you know very well. But the women who had achieved distinction in their own right, not just as women but as archaeologists, were rare. That atmosphere and attitude was changing already in the beginning of the Agora excavations, though you have a couple of examples of it in Margaret Crosby and also





in Lucy Talcott. But it has changed quite radically since then. Women here in this country, and this is true in most countries today, almost dominate the scene in classical archaeology. Here they occupy a large proportion of the top jobs in universities and museums. So, in my experience, seldom is any attention paid to gender; that is one of the changes that has come over archaeology in my time.

SMITH: Since the seventies, I would assume.

THOMPSON: Oh yes, and before the seventies even, yes.

LYONS: What was the attitude of male archaeologists at the School in the earlier days? Did they see women such as Margaret Crosby as collaborators in terms of an attitude of respect for each other?

THOMPSON: Yes, as soon as their abilities became known and demonstrated through publication, oh yes, they were accepted as absolutely full members of the guild.

SMITH: But with Margaret Crosby you have another factor going on, which is the personal wealth, and I wonder to what degree people might forgive certain things just to keep the involvement of someone who would have the wealth to contribute to the project.

THOMPSON: "Buying a place in the field," that is?

SMITH: Well, it might not be necessarily that bald, but where there might be different standards held for people of wealth who did in fact contribute to the AIA



and to the School, and, to use a more Jane Austen-type term, "enterprising people of limited resources."

THOMPSON: Well, in my own experience with the Agora, no, that didn't count. The Crosby family did contribute quite substantially to the Agora excavations, but I'm not sure that that ever got into print . . . well, I do recall an acknowledgment of it in one of my annual reports. They contributed to something in part of the excavation in which Margaret Crosby was directly interested, but it meant that she didn't have to worry about a stipend or anything of that sort. But that didn't count for anything. The same was true of Lucy Talcott. She contributed indirectly in many ways because of her own family means, but at least in the Agora community, no one thought of that.

These two people were accepted, and we had a good many volunteer workers on both long-term and short-term bases, but they were all people who soon proved their worth, and family connections and private means were not taken into account. The daughter of a distinguished architect worked for us as a complete volunteer for several seasons. Her father was the great exponent of neo-Gothic architecture, the man who designed the Princeton University chapel. As I look back, it played no part, their private means.

SMITH: What about Alison Frantz. You've mentioned her a couple of times, but could you just talk about her personality, motivations, or particular contributions?

THOMPSON: Well, she was one of the earliest members of the staff, and she has



been associated with the Agora ever since. She loved the project. She came under the influence of Professor Rufus Morey of Princeton University and did much of her graduate work under him. She almost venerated him as a scholar and as a person. She had gotten a good classical education, but early on she became interested in the Byzantine field, largely under Morey's influence, and she wrote her dissertation on something essentially medieval, on the closed "r" in Byzantine manuscripts. But she always kept in touch with classical archaeology as well. She taught for a time, after getting her Ph.D., but she didn't enjoy teaching—I think it was only a couple of years. She never held a regular university academic position, so she felt free to stay on at the Agora. She was very soon recognized as the one most knowledgeable in matters of late antiquity and later, and everyone thought of her as our representative in the field of medieval, Byzantine, and Turkish periods. She did some splendid work on the early Christian churches and the paintings on their walls. We had a remarkable number in our area, at least four Byzantine churches of the sixteenth or seventeenth century, built under Turkish rule. This is an amazing phenomenon in Athens: the Turks were so tolerant of the Christian church. Then she also published a couple of valuable articles on our Byzantine pottery, which were among the earliest on Athenian-made ware of the period.

As I think I said the other day, Alison had always enjoyed photography on a private scale, but after the war, when our German photographer, Hermann Wagner,





was no longer persona grata in Greece, she took over the photography and was our official photographer for just over a quarter of a century. In that time, in addition to being very busy with Agora photography, both fieldwork and objects, she worked for other distinguished scholars outside. Fairly recently she put together her thoughts about the history of Athens as illustrated by the Agora excavations in a volume on the late antique period in Athens, from the Herulian sack in 267 A.D. down through the time of Justinian in the sixth century. That volume has been very well received as a good record of the contributions of the Agora excavation to the general history of Athens in that long period. I think it will stand for a long time as a standard work. It's being supplemented by the activity of some of the young members of the newly founded Finnish Institute of Archaeology. We have had some correspondence about specific problems. Alison's family settled in Princeton in the early years of this century, so she's a real Princetonian. [Alison Frantz died February 1, 1995, aged ninety-two, as a result of a motor accident.]

[Tape III, Side Two]

SMITH: Another person who was there, it seems, almost from the beginning if not from the absolute beginning was Eugene Vanderpool.

THOMPSON: Oh yes. Well, we landed up in Athens for the first time, both of us, in 1929. He and Rodney Young were fresh graduates from Princeton University, and they had studied under Leslie Shear, Sr. They were both well trained in the classics



and both were inclined toward the archaeological side of things. Eugene Vanderpool for the rest of his life was associated with the Agora, and very closely with Athens. Rodney Young also, for many, many years, was a member of the Agora team, until he went off to Turkey, to Gordium, in 1950. They were two people with much in common, but with many, many differences of personality.

Eugene Vanderpool was interested in all aspects of the classical world. He knew his authors well. Being unfit for military service because of physical disability, he and his family remained in Athens after the outbreak of war and remained undisturbed, helping Greek war relief there until near the end of the war in Europe, when he was taken off to Germany and kept in confinement. What he did there to pass the time and retain his sanity was to read in ancient history and to lecture to his fellow detainees on ancient history, chiefly Thucydides. He did a great deal of reading in those eighteen months or so. In addition to an intense interest in political developments and the machinery of government in ancient Athens, he had a very good eye for Greek art—both sculpture and painting, and also to some extent architecture. His interest was concentrated especially on black-figure pottery. He did some very valuable work in that area, especially in the publication of a vast mass of pottery that came out of one particular deposit found in a great rectangular rock-cut shaft sunk in the shoulder of Kolonos Agoraios, just in front of the Theseum. He wrote two long articles on that deposit. One of them was done here, in this room, while he was a



visiting member of the Institute for Advanced Study.

The deposit was valuable for this reason. The shaft had been sunk either as a well, or perhaps as a prospector's trial; in either case it had proved a failure and soon came to be used by neighboring potters as a dumping place. A very considerable depth of deposit had gathered before the Persian sack of 489 B. C. There was a great mass of material of that period. Then followed a short period of disuse after which the shaft was filled again with material that was obviously post-Persian. Vanderpool was able to divide the pre-Persian from the post-Persian. He was greatly assisted in the absolute dating by the presence of a good many ostraka in the deposit, many of which could be dated to a year, or to within a very short bracket of years.

Vanderpool published the material from the shaft with a sure eye for style and made maximum use of the evidence for tightening up the chronology of late black-figure and early red-figure pottery. His two long articles in *Hesperia*—he never wrote a book on the subject—have served as one of the principal props of our knowledge of the development of Attic pottery in late sixth and early fifth century B.C.

Apart from the shaft Vanderpool did a great deal of excavating elsewhere in the Agora, and developed a very sure feeling for topography. He relied greatly on Pausanias, and came to be regarded as one of the surest interpreters of that author. Some of us, who have found our opinions at variance with Eugene Vanderpool's have



eventually, in most cases, come to repent.

LYONS: He was famous for his long walks, wasn't he?

THOMPSON: Yes, yes, and you went with him on some of those long walks I imagine. Was he still going?

LYONS: He was still there, but I think he wasn't walking.

THOMPSON: Well, for many years he was a member of the teaching staff at the American School as well as an active member of the Agora staff, and, yes, he became famous for his ability to lead and to inspire visits to sites throughout Greece. He knew the material himself, he had it down cold, and he could inspire an interest in younger scholars and draw them out. He knew not only the architectural remains, but was also intensely interested in the flora and fauna of Greece. Oftentimes it was a toss up which he could make more interesting on an expedition. He had a great impact on the students who knew him there in Athens. Among these was a young man who was appointed to the Agora staff during my time, John Camp, who is now the field director of the Agora excavations. He came to know Eugene Vanderpool early in his own career and was tremendously influenced by him. He was a disciple in the most literal sense of the term, and he carries on that tradition, which I think is splendid. Eugene Vanderpool is recognized as the leader, in this respect, of all the foreign schools in Athens for his ability to take a group of students around and make the most of what they saw.





LYONS: What was his personality like? I've seen photographs of him in the early days, wonderfully handsome, sitting in an open car—

THOMPSON: Yes, well, I have a file somewhere of personalities. He was very retiring, as a matter of fact. He was a very modest man, genuinely modest, and in that respect he differed greatly from his lifelong companion Rodney Young, who pushed to the forefront. Eugene Vanderpool would shrink back into one of the back lines, and he seldom spoke at a gathering unless there was reason for his speaking, but when he did speak people listened. He was a very good teammate. He was prepared to assist everyone—the junior members of the staff, all of us—and he was one of the principal contributors to the Agora club, so to speak.

We had a practice of breaking off in the middle of the morning and taking a cup of coffee in the old excavation house or in the Stoa of Atallos, and again in the afternoon after the work finished at five o'clock, we would gather for a cup of tea. That was a good time to keep in touch with each other about developments in his or her section. We could exchange views there and many of the best ideas about the interpretation of our findings came about through discussion at those little gatherings. One pleasant aspect of it was that we could invite scholars who might be visiting us at the time to join in, and that was often an opportunity for all members of the staff to meet distinguished visitors from all over the world.

Well Eugene contributed actively on such occasions to that. I shall never



forget one day when he had been working at the southwest corner of the Agora. It had been a long grind; the fill was very deep, and he'd been working there for weeks without finding anything remotely related to classical antiquity. But on this day at tea he remarked in a low voice that he had at last got down to the classical level in one part of his section, and had found in situ the foundations and the orthostats—the lower part of the walls—of a round building. Period. He confessed that it was about where one would expect the Tholos. Though he was cautious about it, everyone else immediately shouted, "It must be the Tholos!" That was the first physical appearance of the Tholos in modern times. Eugene went on to complete the excavation and of course it turned out to be the Tholos. He did some brilliant work later on the interpretation of the Tholos—its design, its history, and its name, but the style in which he first revealed the discovery was very characteristic of him.

LYONS: Was it the same sort of presentation when he was working on the area of the prison of Socrates; did that discussion happen at tea?

THOMPSON: Yes, yes it did. But then, alas, he was not able to give his first public notice of that momentous identification. He sent over a paper to be read, and it was read by my wife at a memorial service for Rodney Young at Penn [University of Pennsylvania], in the University Museum. Yes, he presented that also in a very modest way. This was another absolutely major discovery in the Agora excavations, and it was made possible by Eugene's full knowledge of the literary as well as the



archaeological evidence. This building was first brought to light by Margaret Crosby. She worked hard over it and did a very good job of excavating. She uncovered the whole of the foundations and left very good accounts of her work in her notebooks. But we were all puzzled at the time because it didn't look like a normal house, nor like a sacred or commercial building. Various suggestions were made, none of them at all plausible. And yet this was a large structure at a strategic point, outside the Agora to be sure, but close to it.

Well, it was finally Eugene Vanderpool who put forward not only the most plausible identification but one that I think is 99 percent certain, as the public prison of ancient Athens, *desmoterion*, and that was based very directly on his combined knowledge of the literary and the archaeological evidence. And it was, as you say, announced in a very modest manner. He himself never reported it as something certain, but as highly probable, and with further consideration, further study, and fuller knowledge of the context, his identification becomes more and more probable. I would regard it as virtually certain now. So he has made major contributions to our work in the Agora but also to the life of the School. And certainly he set very high standards on the teaching side, which has made the School in a way a leader in this side of things, among the foreign schools in Athens—the attention given to young students.

SMITH: He was professor of archaeology during your entire tenure as field director.





There's the personal relationship that you had with him, but how did the two jobs work together? I wonder what was the interaction between the field director's position and the professor of archaeology's position?

THOMPSON: Well, there was never anything very formal about it. I'm not sure that anything was ever put down on paper about it; it was just a simple informal human relationship that developed through the years, long before I became director. But I could always leave. I divided my year for many years about half and half between the two sides of the water, and when I left Athens I knew that I was leaving the Agora in perfectly safe hands. There was seldom any need for immediate communication. There was no fax or anything like that, and we seldom thought of using the telephone. Almost the only telegraphic message I ever got from Eugene had to do with the discovery of the ballot box under the Stoa of Attalos, which gave very specific evidence for the first identification of an ancient law court in Athens. He regarded that as worthy of a telegram. He had the full confidence of our Greek colleagues and the Greek authorities. He spoke perfect Greek, and they found it very easy to communicate with him.

SMITH: Why did he stay in Greece during the war? Wasn't that rather a risky thing to do?

THOMPSON: Yes, but as I mentioned, he was physically unfit for military service. He had lost a kidney early in life, and he had to be very careful of his health. He



loved Greece, and so too did his wife and children, and it was desirable that some member of the staff should be there, if possible, throughout. In any case, he did stay there, and the family were extremely helpful with Greek war relief. They set up a soup kitchen—they lived in one of the suburbs—and they gave food in a regular way to a lot of the poor families in that part of Athens.

SMITH: How did he get his money during the war?

THOMPSON: Don't ask me. I don't know.

SMITH: Was he also independently wealthy?

THOMPSON: Yes, yes. And his wife was wealthy. She was born a Bush, of the Bush terminals. She was a volunteer worker at the Agora in the early days, as a photographer. Her chief duty was photography in several of the early years.

SMITH: When did you realize that war was likely to happen? When did that conviction begin to dawn on you?

THOMPSON: Well, already of course in '39 it was clear that war was coming, so the Thompson family left Greece late in '39.

SMITH: After the war had broken out?

THOMPSON: Yes, oh yes. And I didn't get back until '46, and that was made possible partly by the fact that Eugene Vanderpool was staying on, and also because our chief foreman, Sophokles Lekkias, as I said yesterday, was there looking after the actual property. Our property suffered not at all. One person was drowned in a well



in the Agora excavations; he must have been an intruder and had fallen into it, so that we weren't held responsible for that. It was the only incident affecting us.

SMITH: How did you prepare the site for war?

THOMPSON: A lot of the most important things were carried off and stored in the vaults of the Bank of Greece. That meant packing up a lot of the material, including a complete set of photographs of the two-hundred-odd linear B tablets found in the Palace of Nestor, down at Pylos. The photographs were made by Alison Frantz. These tablets from the Palace of Nestor were brought in to be stored in the vaults at the Bank of Greece, but it seemed desirable to have photographs made. Alison Frantz devoted a couple of days to photographing them, and she did [all] two hundred of them in two days. Then they were taken off and prints were made available to students of Mycenaean things at once, and they were the basis for the decipherment, which I think is a strong bit of evidence in favor of the policy of making the material known, and profiting from the interchange of ideas about it. Yes, things were packed up, and then that was about all we could do.

SMITH: One reads from place to place stories about archaeologists being spies. Do you have any knowledge of that in the Greek situation in the period before the war or during the war?

THOMPSON: No, not really. Some of our people became members of the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, but it didn't affect Greece; it affected Turkey and Egypt



more.

SMITH: I suppose, technically speaking, if you were an intelligence officer during the war you were also a spy.

THOMPSON: Yes, yes. Well, Alison Frantz was in the OSS for several years, and she did very valuable work in Washington. One of her duties was to scan the Greek newspapers as they appeared, and of course she had a very thorough knowledge of the country and its politics and all. No, the only wartime relations I had with Greece were toward the end of the European war, in October 1944, just after the Germans had pulled out of Athens and were retreating northward, I happened to be stationed in naval intelligence with a small allied detachment down at Bari, in south Italy. I had a week's leave due me, and I decided to take it by going over to Athens. So I flew over as one of our first aircraft to enter Greece peacefully after the withdrawal of the Germans.

While I was there in Athens the Greek civil war broke out. I had gone over to see what I could see of the state of the Agora excavations and to meet old Greek colleagues. I had learned that my old colleague in the excavations of the Pnyx, Dr. Kourouniotis, was seriously ill, and I wanted to see something of him while I was there. So toward what I thought was the end of my visit, I spent the morning of one day in the Benaki Museum, talking with Mr. Benaki, the founder, looking at a magnificent set of proofs of one of his big books on Greek costume. And then





around midday I set off in the hope of getting to see Dr. Kourouniotis, who was living then in the Austrian embassy on the far side of town, way over beyond the Omónia Square. I inquired of the proper authorities about the possibility of getting through Athens at that time. The civil war was on and fighting was going on here and there all through Athens. Well, as I went along things were different at one intersection after another. In one place I noticed that people were walking hurriedly across an intersection. Then came a time when if any people were crossing they were crawling across.

Eventually I came to an intersection where all was quiet and no one was moving. I thought that I was in a completely peaceful area at last, but it turned out that this was no-man's-land, and very soon I was surrounded by a number of young men wearing typically communist berets. They were members of the communist group, the EAM, who were then fighting the government forces. I was taken off to a school house which they had taken over as their headquarters, and I spent the next four days as their prisoner. I never let on that I spoke Greek, so that I could follow their discussion when it came time to try and decide what was to be done with this prisoner.

SMITH: They knew you were a Canadian officer?

THOMPSON: Well, I eventually pointed that out. I had a Canadian naval uniform with its buttons of the Canadian navy marked clearly on it. Then, as I say, I spent



four days with what they regarded as a friendly family, but it was interesting to follow the discussion. They had various ideas about it. Some thought that I should be kept as an ordinary prisoner, some thought that I should be sent off into the mountains—that was being done to many people whom they didn't like. Then one of their own people came in from a battle area to report the death of a couple of their comrades. He was very wrought up, and he listened to the discussion for a moment, then he said, in his opinion the prisoner should be taken out and shot as an example to others. Well, the discussion continued. I happened to have a packet of cigarettes in my pocket, and passed them round, and I watched with interest the reaction of the young man who'd made this pronouncement. He hesitated a moment, but eventually took a cigarette. That seemed to be a good omen.

The final decision in any case was that I should be installed in a private house over on the far side of Lykavittós and there I stayed for four days. They had run out of food themselves, the situation was becoming impossible, so another conference was held, and the decision was that I should go back to the government side of the lines; one of their people would escort me to the borderline if I would support him on the other side. They wanted to make contact with the ambassadors of Britain, of France, and of the USA. So we did that, we crossed the borderline. This was one Sunday morning. There were a fair number of people lying dead in the street up and down.



We got to the French embassy first, only to be told that the French ambassador was at church. So we went on to the British embassy. The British ambassador refused to see the young man representing EAM. So we made our way to the Gennadeion Library, where the American embassy was ensconced. I happened to know personally quite well the American ambassador of the time, Mr. Lincoln MacVeagh. I explained the situation to him, and he listened very politely to the story of the young man. The young man had hoped, and this was why he had been sent, that the U.S. would intervene at this stage of the civil war. Well, Mr. MacVeagh said that not even as ambassador could he give them a definite answer to that. He would have to refer the matter to Washington. But he was very proper and cordial, and so the young man's mission was accomplished and I led him back to the borderline and we said good-bye.

We passed through the Kolonáki area where I was known to a fair number of people who greeted me in Greek and I responded in Greek. My companion remarked, "For one who has been in Greece so short a time you have picked up a remarkable number of Greek fans." [laughter] Well, that was a terrible time in Greek history. There was such complete uncertainty, such chaos within the country. The country was very much divided between the communists and the supporters of royalty, the conservatives. That broke up the old political relationships, as well as family relationships, and the impact of it was observable for years and years afterwards.





SMITH: How did the civil war affect your work—both in the Agora, and generally, archaeological work?

THOMPSON: Not much. It's the aim of the School in all its enterprises, to keep clear of Greek politics, because if you are known to be the supporter of any particular brand of Greek politics, then when things change in the government you find life difficult.

SMITH: But at the same time you have to work with the government, and cooperate with them, and somebody like [Ioannes] Metaxas wouldn't tolerate much opposition.

THOMPSON: Well, we had to be very careful. The most difficult time came with the colonels. Here's one example of our relationship with them: we had been trying to get authorization from the Greek government to extend our area of excavation northward beyond the railway tracks. What we wanted was not a gift of the property but the authorization to excavate these additional blocks, which were not in the original agreement. We had presented our wish to successive Greek governments, conservative and liberal, for several years. Though they professed to be well disposed toward our request, they did nothing about it, and things were becoming urgent. We had to find the money to do it, and do a bit of planning in advance, and this became really terribly frustrating. Then came the colonels, and the responsible position—namely the ministry of culture in the government—was headed by the man who excavated Thera, Professor [Spyridon] Marinatos. This was under the colonels.



So, having known him personally, I thought to make one final effort about this authorization. I called on him in his office and explained our needs. He realized at once the significance of this request, and without more ado he gave us the needed authorization. It was all formalized right off, and that indicated the difference in the efficiency between the previous governments and the government of the colonels.

We discussed a little the matter of the colonels, and he said that he found himself in a very difficult position because he had not taken on this position willingly; he didn't volunteer for it, but he was called upon to do it since he was one of the leading archaeologists of the time, and so felt obliged to assume the responsibility. He said, "In considering this matter and my behavior in it, you must consider the alternative. Had I not taken on the job it would have been taken on by a soldier, a member of the colonels' party." Well, that is perhaps illustrative of our relations with the Greek political setup.

SMITH: What was your reaction to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan?

THOMPSON: I think it is one of the great things that this country has contributed to Greece—certainly in my time and in modern history. The country was in a terrible state toward the end of the civil war. Politically the scene was chaotic and the economy had been completely disrupted; they were in need of almost everything. It was time for this country to increase its aid in a more systematic and orderly way, and of course they felt that they would have to deal evenly with Greece and Turkey. It



was finally through the Truman plan that Greece was put back on her feet. The Greeks, with some military counseling and advice from this country, were able to win the civil war and to save the country from complete occupation by the leftists, and that as I see it did quite literally save Greece from going behind the Iron Curtain and being subject to communism for, say, thirty or forty years. The same was true of Turkey. When one considers the state of the other countries of eastern Europe after long years of communism, I think one can appreciate the tremendous importance of this American aid at a critical time.

The Greeks acknowledged this at the time by setting up a great bronze statue of Truman in a very prominent place in Athens, down by the stadium. It's not a very attractive statue of Truman, with his long overcoat flying out behind, as though he were in a great hurry, as indeed he had to be at times. This monument has become a sort of weather vane in Greek politics and Greek political life nowadays. In general, the erection of the statue is seen as a symbol of Greek gratitude for American aid, bearing the name of President Truman, but subsequently, when a leftist majority was in control of Greek affairs, then the great old bronze statue would be splattered with paint, and this was rather embarrassing at the ambassadorial level. [laughter] With a change of government the paint would have to be hastily scrubbed off, and this happened more than once. But I was very glad to read, in the great new biography of President Truman, that the idea of the Truman plan was largely the work of my old



colleague here, George Kennan, and it gets full recognition in that book.

SMITH: You mention that the civil war had a polarizing effect on Greek civil life, and I wonder to what degree it affected the American School's relationship with Greek intellectuals after '49, or '50?

THOMPSON: Not much, not much. There were among Greek intellectuals, and even among the Greek archaeologists, a number of leftists, and it had some effect in the Greek community, but it didn't much affect the relations between the Greek community and the members of the foreign schools.

SMITH: So you worked with leftists as well as supporters of the government?

THOMPSON: Yes, oh yes. We didn't talk politics.

SMITH: But isn't there a distinctive Marxist approach to archaeology that was very critical of the way archaeology was being practiced in the west?

THOMPSON: Yes, there was some, but it certainly didn't affect us and didn't affect our own policy, if I may speak just for the Agora. It didn't affect our thinking about our mission, because our mission was pretty clearly defined from the beginning, and we just kept on. No, it hasn't bothered us greatly, though we've had to deal of course with successive Greek governments and with successive ministers of culture and all.

LYONS: Were there Greek archaeologists that were working along Marxist ideological lines in their research, not so much politically, but in their writing?

THOMPSON: Yes, but I wouldn't regard it as a serious movement or development.





SMITH: Well, we took a little bit of a digression, but to get back to the personalities, the next person we were going to talk about was Rodney Young.

THOMPSON: About Rodney Young. Well, as I say, he and Eugene Vanderpool were exact contemporaries. He came of a good family, a family of some means, from Newark. Their old house still stands in Newark, I believe. He had graduated from Princeton, took his B.A. there, and came over in 1929. He became a member of the staff almost at once. He was a good scholar and worked hard. As compared with Eugene Vanderpool he was a rather flamboyant person, not disgustingly so, but very obviously so, and he didn't wait to be asked for his opinion about any matter that might come up. He did a great deal of excavating in the Agora. The most important excavation was his first. This was a large area at the southwest corner of the Agora, and there he came down on a cemetery, which has proven to be of very considerable interest.

[Tape IV, Side One]

THOMPSON: This is still known as the Tholos Cemetery. Rodney Young discovered some twenty-two burials there. It turned out later that most of them represented one family, which must have been one of the leading families of Athens at the time. The burials were datable from the style of the abundant offerings, the pottery, to the eighth and early seventh century B.C. This was one of the largest groups of graves of that period known in Athens. In general, our findings in the



Protogeometric and Geometric period are much scantier than the findings of the Germans out beyond the Dipylon. But this particular group is rather unique in being so clearly defined as a family burial place. This was Rodney Young's first important find. He dug it very carefully, his records are good, and he took a very active interest, especially in the pottery. He did an excellent long article on it in *Hesperia*, and that remained his principal interest in the Agora excavations, that period and especially the pottery of that period.

SMITH: Are these what are sometimes referred to as the royal tombs?

THOMPSON: No, no, these were not royal burials, but they must represent a noble family to judge from the number and quality of the funeral offerings. We now know that at this time our area, the area that later came to be the familiar Agora of classical times, was largely a cemetery with individual graves, or small family groups of graves scattered here and there. The land in between was probably cultivated as farmland, and quite important roads had already been marked out going through this area leading to the southeast of Athens and to the Acropolis, and these burials are placed in relation to those graves. Rodney Young did a very good job in both the excavation and publication of this cemetery. We were fortunate in having a young physical anthropologist on our staff at this time. He worked with us for several years and then joined the staff of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. Now his name has gone completely from me.



LYONS: [J. Lawrence] Angel?

THOMPSON: Angel, yes. He worked over these skeletons when they were fresh from the earth, a great advantage. He had them fresh and he could talk with the excavator about them. He produced an excellent report. I was very much interested in the fact that he recognized family similarities among these skeletal remains, so he became convinced that they were practically all of the same family, but there were some intrusive elements, and he could distinguish between the long-headed type and the short-headed type. These had been regarded as representing very diverse types by anthropologists previously. He showed that already in the eighth century B.C. the Greek people were of very diverse anthropological origins, so to speak, and it was nonsense to put too much emphasis on the shape of the skull. He was able to point out evidence for various diseases and tooth troubles. This became so clear that we invited the cooperation of a leading Greek dentist, who had studied in the U.S.A. He got to work on the teeth, and that led to his close study of the history of dental decay in Greece, starting way back in the Neolithic period and coming right down to modern times. It was really depressing to discover the rise of dental decay as civilization advanced.

Well, that was Rodney Young's chief contribution to the Agora; he was a very active member of our little scholarly community. But then, after the war, he became interested in an undertaking in Turkey, and as you know his later life was devoted to





the exploration of ancient Gordium. He had been fascinated by the role played by Gordium in ancient history and in mythology. His work there was of just tremendous importance. His experience with our early cemetery in the Agora had prompted him early on to put great emphasis on the great tombs surrounding ancient Gordium. He did an excellent job of excavating the largest mound—a very difficult undertaking—but the results were of tremendous importance for the history of Anatolia. It was undoubtedly a royal or a nobleman's tomb, and it had been completely untouched; it was virtually intact. He found things there as they had been when the door was finally closed and a load of earth dumped over it in the eighth century B.C. As his archaeological findings could be correlated with the literary notices of Gordium, it gave him a pretty sure feeling for the chronology of the earliest period, the seventh century B.C., and that has been published by the University Museum in Philadelphia, which was the sponsoring party for his work there in Gordium. He'll be remembered probably more for his work in Gordium than for his work in the Agora, but his initial work in the Agora was of great importance to us too, and he was, as I say, a very active member of our group.

SMITH: You had academic people and more amateur people working together, and they both made important contributions, but do you think, nonetheless, that there was a distinction in the way they worked and thought? Was there some special benefit to having a university training and being part of a university structure?



THOMPSON: Oh yes, in the case of classical archaeology and particularly in our work there in the heart of ancient Athens, a good knowledge of classical literature and ancient history pertaining to Greece and Athens was absolutely essential, because wherever you turned and almost with whatever period you were concerned, you've got to know the available literary evidence.

SMITH: Wouldn't somebody like Margaret Crosby know that just as well as Rodney Young?

THOMPSON: Yes, she had been educated at Bryn Mawr.

SMITH: I'm actually talking more about a professional position—being connected to a university and being part of the academic world—as opposed to being engaged in archaeology as an independent person with a strong interest, but nonetheless not involved in the processes of education and that sort of thing.

THOMPSON: Well, most of our people have retained academic contacts and positions. The field director for instance, Leslie Shear, Sr., divided his time between Athens and Princeton, and I did for many years between Athens and Toronto and then between Athens and Princeton. And Leslie Shear, Jr., of course divided his year half and half between Athens and Princeton. Eugene Vanderpool was an exception; he never held an academic position in this country, and the same is true of John Camp, but they have both been active members of the Managing Committee of the American School.



Then of course they see a great deal of the oncoming young people through contact with the members of the summer sessions at the School. As you undoubtedly know, the School runs a summer session in two groups, normally of about twenty people each, that means about forty young people, and inevitably the people active in the excavations of the School and all the excavations around, both of the American School and the other institutes have an opportunity to meet and hear the leading archaeologists of the time. So that there's a good two-way traffic there.

SMITH: Another person that I thought we should talk about, someone you had a thirty-five-year long professional relationship with, was John Travlos. I'm interested in how the theoretical and the practical aspects of the archaeologist-architect-field director relationship worked themselves out while you were doing the survey work. How did that work itself out in the Agora?

THOMPSON: Well, [Travlos] was chosen by Dr. Kourouniotis as the architect for our excavations on the Pnyx. At that time he was completing his studies at the Polytechnion in Athens, and he was very soon taken on as the architect of the Agora excavations. He continued in that capacity until he reached retirement age, but then he continued to occupy an office in one of the buildings that had been taken over by the archaeological service near the Agora, so he kept up contact. We had a close relationship from 1930 until his death in 1988, I think it was.

He was a splendid person. The family came from Istanbul, but his parents



came to Athens and that was his home for the rest of his active life. He was entirely committed, from his days as a student at the Polytechnion, to archaeological architecture, and he was really interested in both aspects. He was very much interested in archaeology—the overall importance of this branch of learning. He was equally interested in all aspects of architecture, and the combination had superb results. He was more able than any other architect of our time working in archaeology, in my experience, to read a complex architectural situation in a whole scramble of ruinous buildings—to sort things out and see the main outlines of the original building and then to present them clearly in a plan, and to visualize the building not only in the horizontal plane but also in the vertical plane. He didn't attempt much drawing of landscape or persons, he stuck to his buildings, but he could indicate the scale by a very simple human figure or the like. He had a very sure feeling for the ancient practice in architecture.

Concurrently with his work with us, and especially in the early years at the Agora, he was almost equally involved with work at Eleusis, where he worked very closely with his old mentor, Dr. Kourouniotis. They were a splendid team there, Kourouniotis being the scholarly archaeologist, knowing the history of the site from the ancient sources and from the modern excavations, and Travlos putting Kourouniotis's knowledge together with his and presenting their interpretation of this extremely complex and difficult site in a readily intelligible form. In this matter of





presentation, let me say that Travlos was the first person in Greece to realize the importance of models for presenting an ancient building, or a group of buildings, and this is a very important aspect of his contribution.

Very soon, fairly early in the history of the Agora excavations, he decided that we must have a model, and he trained a young technician who had been with us as a pot mender for years, who was a highly intelligent person with great manual dexterity, and a great admirer of Travlos. Travlos trained this young man, Christos Mammelis, to make models in plaster. They stuck to plaster throughout, they never turned to other materials, and that has made all the difference in the world in our presentation of the results of our work in Athens. Travlos did the same for Eleusis—again, an extremely difficult site to understand. His models of Eleusis have made it intelligible to any intelligent visitor, and there is a model of it there in the museum at Eleusis.

Finally, in his later years, he worked a lot with the museum of the history of Athens. I don't know whether you know that little museum. It was in the building first occupied by the royal family when they came to Athens in 1831. It's a very nice information museum of the history of the city of Athens in all its periods. He did a model there for that museum, showing the city as it was in the last years of Turkish occupation, just before the royal family took it over, and that is a beautiful and enormously helpful piece of work. The Germans took an active interest—of course the first king of Greece was a German prince. The Germans have always taken



account of that relationship between the two countries. They took a real interest in this old house, since it had been the first residence of the German prince. The first edition of the guide to the museum, which was written by Travlos, appeared in German and was followed by a Greek edition. He had always enjoyed such a special relationship with the Germans as well as with the Americans, and this was very profitable, as illustrated by the fact that his great book, the [*Pictorial*] *Dictionary of Ancient Athens*, was published by a German firm, and another of his great books, namely the topography of the whole of Attica, was also a German publication, translated. The dictionary of the city of Athens has been translated into English of course, the other not yet.

Travlos had an interest not only in the Agora and all its development and architectural detail, but in the whole city of Athens. He kept in touch with the new finds being made, especially in the years after the war, but throughout his career. He was a rather unusual figure in Greek academic life since he had far more friends than enemies. He was able to communicate easily with the people in charge of the innumerable excavations going on constantly in all parts of Athens. He was well known and his help was greatly welcomed by the young people usually in charge of these excavations. He often drew plans and made drawings for them, and in return he was given access to all this new material, which he kept on record; and that was tremendously helpful of course and valuable when he came to put together his



topographical dictionary of ancient Athens—he had firsthand knowledge of the whole city. He himself supervised excavations on a very large scale down around the temple of Olympian Zeus, and the Ilissos River. In that way he was superbly equipped by autopsy.

He was a very shy and retiring person. He could read English easily, and he could speak it if called upon to speak it, but he was not strong in foreign languages. We normally conversed in Greek, and he much preferred that. He was capable of very close and useful relationships. On pretty well all his big publications he got tremendous help from a Greek woman, Miss Angeliki Kokkou, who had a very good education, with a particular interest in ancient history and archaeology, but who had been, I think throughout her active life, on the staff of the Bank of Greece. She was able to take time off to work with Travlos. She was very good in foreign languages; she speaks very good English and German also. She made herself responsible for bringing to his attention the new books and the significant new articles in the journals, and that accounts for the sheer beauty of the bibliographies that accompany all his articles in the topographical dictionary—at least I find them just what they should be, just right. They include all the valuable works. They don't include all the insignificant articles, so they are limited but very precise and extremely useful, and that is due very largely to her. She herself has written some very good articles.

Travlos did get a couple of prizes for his own books. One was for his first big





volume on the historical development of the town plan of Athens from beginning to end. That was his doctoral dissertation, chapter after chapter devoted to twelve successive periods in the history of Athens from prehistoric times down to modern times. Travlos had hoped to be able to publish them just as a series of drawings, but he was required by his advisers, quite rightly, to write at least a short text to accompany the plans, which he did. It's a very succinct account, but beautifully clear. It appeared in the mid-thirties and it's still the standard work on the historical development of the town plan of an important ancient city.

We owe Travlos really a very great deal, because throughout the long years of his active tenure of the job of architect of the Agora, pretty well all the architectural illustrations that appear in *Hesperia* and the other School publications are by him. Yet he managed to write copiously on non-Agora subjects. Now, as I look back on it, it's fantastic that he should have accomplished so much outside of his regular appointment. Some of my colleagues have occasionally raised their eyebrows about the amount of time he took outside the Agora doing things not directly related to the Agora. But I was always on his side, because I realized that in his association with the American School he had a firm base from which to work, and firm bases are fairly rare in the Greek world—and the results have been magnificent.

SMITH: The next person I wanted to ask you about was Henry Immerwahr.

THOMPSON: Yes, he was of course a colleague inasmuch as he was director of the



School at the time. He did a good job there, and he and his wife were greatly respected by the Greek community; it was an affectionate relationship between him and his Greek colleagues and the Greek governmental people. The Agora, like all the departments of the American School, profited from his efficient and sensitive administration. He did not himself contribute much directly to the Agora. We knew that his central interest in things archaeological has been in the graffiti that appear on ancient vases, and he has made that an interesting subject. So he knew our material of that kind very well.

We owe a great deal to his wife [Sara Anderson Immerwahr], who is a Bryn Mawr graduate—very well trained and an excellent scholar. She did a volume in our official series of publications on the results of the Agora excavations as they illustrate the historic development of Athens from the earliest times, from the Paleolithic, Neolithic, right down to the beginning of the Iron Age. That's become a standard work on the history of the period and it's much respected.

SMITH: He started there in the thirties and he had the title "German refugee scholar," which is quite striking of course.

THOMPSON: Yes, well, this branch of academic life in Greece has profited enormously from the coming of these great German scholars, and Heinrich Immerwahr is a good example. Somehow or other people like him have transplanted very well. They have been able to fit into the American community, and one seldom



thought about his German origin. There was always a little reminder because by some people he was known as "Heinrich" Immerwahr, and by others as "Henry"

Immerwahr. [laughter]

SMITH: What was the community life like? Did you all live in the School or near it? Did you socialize together?

THOMPSON: Not a great deal. We were free there in Athens. Unlike the normal excavation in the country, we could get away from each other in the evening, which I think in a way was profitable. Perhaps in a way it was a hindrance.

SMITH: Nonetheless there were a lot of romances and marriages that seem to have come out of the School, including your own.

THOMPSON: Yes, well it's a professional hazard. [laughter] But you learn quite a lot about a person by working with him or with her in an excavation.

SMITH: Your wife [Dorothy Burr Thompson] was at the School. Was she working on the Agora?

THOMPSON: Yes. She had been in Greece much earlier than I. She had gone first to Greece on a Bryn Mawr fellowship. She was in fact the first holder of one of Bryn Mawr's international fellowships. That supported her for three years. She chose to spend the whole time in Greece, and she led a very active life in those years. She excavated with Miss [Hetty] Goldman at Eutresis, a prehistoric site in Boeotia, where she took an active part both in the fieldwork and in the publication. With Professor



Carl Blegen she worked one season at Phlius, the respected setting of Plato's *Phaedo*, near Nemea and a second season with Professor Blegen on chamber tombs of the Mycenaean period near the Argive Heraeum, not far from Mycenae. [On a Sunday morning horseback ride through the lovely countryside, she recognized a group of tomb robbers working among the ruins of a Mycenaean tholos tomb. She reported the incident and so saved from plundering one of the most richly furnished of all Mycenaean tombs. The tomb was expertly excavated the following year by a Swedish expedition and its contents became one of the great treasures of the National Museum in Athens. In their publication the Swedes made full acknowledgment to Dorothy for her part. Among the excavators was the crown prince of Sweden, with whom Dorothy kept in touch for the rest of his life.]

The other day, on her ninety-fourth birthday, Dorothy was delighted to learn that a Cincinnati expedition, which has been working at Midea on the Mycenaean settlement contemporary with the tomb has at last been able to recognize the big building which they have been clearing as a Mycenaean palace, and the remains found in it are very similar to those found in her tomb. So Dorothy had already had a short but active archaeological career when she became a member of the Agora team in 1932, and you'll still today find her name on the official directory of the American School as a research associate.

SMITH: Could you tell us a little bit about her family background, and of how her





interest in classical studies developed?

THOMPSON: She came of a Philadelphia family. Her father was an international lawyer. Her mother was a writer; most of her books were novels. She wrote twenty or twenty-one novels, biographies of several important American businessmen, and a scholarly work on autobiography as a literary genre. She also did a book on Christian confession. So the mother was really a very literary person, and Dorothy inherited a lot from both parents, from the legal father and the literary mother. She's a very good combination of the two.

She also enjoyed and profited greatly from three years in London during World War I, when her father was there as legal adviser to the British government—from 1916 to 1918. She absorbed a great deal about London and English society at that time under stress and strain, and that has remained with her all her life. She can even put on a British accent if necessary. But she's a first-rate scholar herself. Her main field has been the minor arts in the Hellenistic period, above all the terra-cotta figurines, and she has become a world authority on that subject.

SMITH: Her work is a blend of archaeology and art history, and I'm wondering if you could give some thoughts on how those two disciplines work together—the ways in which they are distinct and the ways in which they overlap?

THOMPSON: Yes, well, she is a good example. She appears in the book *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1820–1979* [edited by Claire Richter Sherman]. I



think I drew it to your attention. She is I think correctly regarded as an art historian as well as an archaeologist, because she has a feeling for history, but also has a very fine eye and a keen mind for the aesthetic aspects of Greek art. On the other hand, she insists on autopsy when it comes to dealing with objects of art, and this comes out constantly in her work with terra-cotta figurines, an area that is bedeviled by the important role played by forgeries in modern times. She has always been very cautious when questioned about objects owned by friends or acquaintances.

In using museum material she has always tried to make sure that the object is genuine. Her judgment is usually based on visual observation, but she will even say that she can tell by the smell of a terra-cotta whether it's ancient or modern! This is enormously important. I remember during World War II I happened to be in England a bit and I heard Professor J. D. Beazley give a lecture in London—this was in the middle of the war. He was called upon to talk about his own profession. He said, "Well, when it comes to art history and archaeology, the first thing to do in taking on the study of any particular object is to determine whether or not it's ancient, or as old as it pretends to be." So with him, too, that was basic. This is very pronounced in Dorothy's scholarship. In her books and articles, where she's arguing seriously about the historical development of this branch of Greek art, she will insist first and foremost that the objects she is looking at in a museum, from another excavation, are ancient.



So, yes, Dorothy is correctly described as a combination of archaeologist and art historian. Some of her shorter articles, on the dancer for instance, the little bronze ["A Bronze Dancer from Alexandria." *American Journal of Archaeology* 54(1950): 371–385], are little gems of literary composition; that's just one example, there are several others. I don't know whether you know her *Swans in Amber*[:*Some Early Greek Lyrics Freely Translated and Adapted*], her translation of a number of the poems of Sappho and her contemporaries; it's a beautiful little book. It's hard to keep a supply of them on hand. People have been learning about it from one another and this has meant dealing out a good many copies. She's quite a poet also.

We've worked closely together. We were working side by side, actually, in her first season of excavation, literally in adjoining sections. I was interested chiefly in the architectural remains, but as it happened I came on the foundations of what was clearly an early shrine connected probably with a very early burial, an example of hero worship in the Agora; we now have several of them. There's a great mass of material, obviously votive offerings at this little shrine—a great many terra-cotta figurines, of human figures, animal figures, shields, chariots and so on. I threw up my hands in despair as these came out, not by the dozens but by the hundreds, because my principal interest was in the architecture. So I turned over this part of my section to her. I was very grateful when she took it on and made something splendid of it; she wrote it up in a long article in the second volume of *Hesperia* (1933). It is still





regarded as one of the most important deposits of groups of material of this kind from Athens of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., so her first article for the Agora excavations was a very scholarly piece of work. That made me feel full of admiration for her as a scholar, and I had already come to think very well of her as a person. The results was inevitable, I suppose. This has happened repeatedly in the Agora circle.

SMITH: What kind of arrangements did you two make so that she could continue her career?

THOMPSON: Well, it was difficult. We eventually had three children, and we continued to divide our time almost every year equally between Athens and Toronto when the children were small. But in both cases we could afford some domestic help. In Toronto we had for some years a young woman who was a distant relative of Sir Arthur Evans. No one could have been less interested in archaeology than she, but she was very good with the children and that helped a lot. In Greece, most of the time, when the children were young, we could afford to have a Greek cook and a Greek maid to look after them, and these were admirable people from the Greek islands—most maids in Athens come from the Greek islands. It also took a great deal of sheer management on Dorothy's part to keep life going, because she continued to be a regular member of the staff, and to get on with her scholarly work. Then I was with the Royal Canadian Navy for the best part of three years during the war (1942–1945), and Dorothy took over my lecture courses at the University of Toronto



—a full teaching load, and that was hard going. Her ability was recognized by the museum people, and for one year she was acting director of the whole of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology. I don't think she enjoyed it much. She found it very difficult, but she obviously did it very well, and they would gladly have had her continue. But it was impossible after the war because she had to get back to Athens. She has had a hard life, but she has survived it, and she's now past ninety-four.

SMITH: Did she continue to teach after the war?

THOMPSON: She taught for short periods in various universities. She taught one year at Bryn Mawr, and she taught one year at Oberlin College. We were invited together by the Australian-American Society for Interchange of Scholarly Personnel to spend a half year at the University of Sydney. She lectured there, and we both enjoyed that experience very much, since we saw a good deal of Sydney itself of course, but they also arranged for us to lecture at eight other universities in Australia and New Zealand. We saw a good deal of that part of the world and discovered how active they are in higher education and museum work, and notably in classical archaeology. They've done great things. Dorothy has given a fair number of public lectures, here, there, and everywhere. She lectured occasionally when we were in Oxford in the year 1959-60.

LYONS: Did she advise on dissertations?

THOMPSON: No, she hasn't done much formally.



LYONS: But she's frequently cited in acknowledgments in so many books.

THOMPSON: Yes, she's had a good many young assistants and protégées.

[Tape IV, Side Two]

THOMPSON: Yes, this has been very interesting and very nice to observe, the relationship between her and her . . . oh, I suppose a half-dozen young scholars, who have assisted her in her work in Athens and even over here; it's a relationship that lasts. We had a visit last week from an old helper who is now married to a Canadian archaeologist teaching in Montreal. She has taken part in Canadian excavations on the island of Mytilene (Lesbos), and is responsible for the publication of the terra-cotta figurines found there. Later she had as an assistant Joan Breton Connelly, who was very helpful to Dorothy in her work on terra-cottas. Joan Connelly is one of the brightest young people in our field in this country. She's on the staff of New York University, the department of art history, and she's done some good writing. After a book on sculpture from Cypriote sanctuaries her second book will be on the role of the priestess in ancient Greece, and this led to a reconsideration of the basic theme of the Parthenon frieze. It's a very complete revision of our thinking about the so-called Panathenaic frieze. She's already lectured a good deal about it, but hasn't yet published anything beyond a synopsis. Her theory hasn't been accepted by everyone in this country, even by people who have known the Parthenon and thought about it for years, because it represents a basic shift from the contemporary long-held view



that the frieze represents the Panathenaic procession as it was known in the fifth century, B.C., to a mythical theme having to do with the sacrifice of the daughters of King Erechtheus to save the city from an imminent invasion. That's a fairly basic change, and for elderly scholars, it's hard to take. But Joan's interpretation has won fairly general acceptance in Europe. So much so that she was invited to Oxford, where her ideas were in general well received, as also in Cambridge and Paris. The impression was such in Oxford that a group of her Oxford acquaintances got together and nominated her for a visiting membership at All Souls' College. That went through, and she departed last Friday for Oxford, where she will spend the year. She will be one of four women, together with sixty men as fellows at All Souls. It would be hard to think of a higher recognition of her competence than this accolade from the people at Oxford, where there's a great assembly of scholars who know Greek art of the classical period inside out, as well as classical literature..

SMITH: Are you convinced by her thesis?

THOMPSON: I find it very plausible. Perhaps it hasn't yet reached the point of certainty, but I think the scholars who are still hesitant to consider it seriously should keep in mind that even the current theory involves grave difficulties. I think on the whole her new theory has fewer serious difficulties in its way than the old. In any case, her presentation of this new idea has stirred up an enormous amount of new and serious consideration of this basic monument in the history of Greek art, and this is





something for a young scholar to have achieved. And she did it in a very honest way. She was not concerned with glamour; her interpretation developed naturally out of her study of the priestess in ancient Greece. So those two are characteristic of the half-dozen young students who have worked with Dorothy.

SMITH: You started teaching at the University of Toronto in 1933. Could you tell us a little bit about the state of classics in Canada at the time, and what your teaching responsibilities involved?

THOMPSON: At that time the University of Toronto had already a strong tradition in the classics and in ancient history. And then an interest in archaeology was encouraged and in a way excited by the development of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, which, due to the classical interests of its first director, Charles Trick Currelly, attached great importance to the Greco-Roman period. At that time the Royal Ontario Museum was regarded as the university museum and was referred to officially as the Royal Ontario Museum of the University of Toronto, which is a provincial university. Things have changed now; they are now legally separate. Both are under the provincial government, but they no longer interlock.

In my time, the person holding a position in archaeology in the University was naturally and normally responsible for the same area in the museum. It does show that they were advanced at that time in their thinking about the study of the ancient world—certainly mine was the first professorship in archaeology anywhere in Canada.



It was there regarded as part of art history, and there was already an English scholar there, John Alford, who was a specialist in Renaissance art history, but the department had not yet been formally organized, so he and I were responsible for setting up the Department of Art and Archaeology, and we thought it proper that the two disciplines should be combined, because they both have a great deal to contribute to each other.

We also agreed that some knowledge of studio procedure, the practical aspect of art, should be incorporated, and so a proportion of the colleagues in the department were practicing artists, and we had very close relations with the Ontario College of Art. For those who came to specialize in archaeology, we also insisted that they must have a good knowledge of ancient languages, and when it came to the classical period in their studies they were expected to have a good working knowledge at least of German and French. We also encouraged them, if they developed a special interest in any one area, to take the relevant courses in, say, the French or German literature and philosophy. It was a program that made it possible for anyone with an interest in classical art to have gotten a useful background by the time he graduated, and if by that time he had developed an interest in archaeology, he could then proceed at once to do serious work in graduate studies.

At that time there was both a "mods" and an "honors" division within each department and anyone with any idea of going on into archaeology would be required



to take at least one course in archaeology in each of the last three of his four undergraduate years, so that on graduation he would be well equipped to go on and do serious work in that field. [The academic situation at Toronto is now more complex. At the graduate level the departments of classical studies, history of art, and Near Eastern studies participate in a collaborative Program of Ancient Studies, thus making possible a rich blend of professional attitude and a wide geographic spread.] I think a somewhat similar setup has worked well at Bryn Mawr, hasn't it?

LYONS: I'd say so. They are separate departments, but with a lot of overlap and sharing of seminars—

THOMPSON: Yes, and points of view. Elsewhere of course, archaeology is allied with anthropology, and that too is a useful sort of marriage. In other places, archaeology is very closely allied with classical studies, and that's another natural form of marriage. In any case, I don't think archaeology should be regarded too strictly as an independent discipline.

SMITH: Why not?

THOMPSON: Well, in order to do its best, I think it should at least share the work. In the case of classical archaeology, I regard a knowledge of relevant history and literature as essential. But the discipline also profits enormously from the attitude toward objects, works of art, and the art world in general that one finds in art departments. Certainly in our time the relationship between archaeology and





anthropology has obviously become very close. Both sides should profit; certainly archaeology has profited greatly. Of course in less fundamental but in very important ways, the modern archaeologist has got to work closely with scientists in the need for analyzing materials, the need for determining the age of materials, and in prospecting ancient sites prior to excavation. Whether they are allied academically or not in actual practice, the modern archaeologist just has to consult his scientific colleagues very frequently, and he'd better have some understanding of their points of view and what they're doing.

SMITH: What were the courses that you taught at Toronto?

THOMPSON: They were confined pretty much to straight classical archaeology.

SMITH: So they were introductory lessons in how to be an archaeologist, or surveying what archaeologists had presented?

THOMPSON: Well, the history of Greek and Roman art and civilization and the topography of the city of Athens. In my later years there I taught some graduate courses. We had small groups of graduate students in archaeology already at that time. I enjoyed that, but it would have been difficult to have had many graduate students, because I was away so much of the time. [In general my practice was to enable the interested undergraduate to get a good basic knowledge of archaeology and then to assist him or her to find opportunities elsewhere to do specialized research aiming at a Ph.D. degree.]



One such student in my last years at Toronto was William A. McDonald, who, as I think I said the other day, had been one of the first scholars to organize a survey of a significant area in Greece. [Having been fortunate in winning a generous fellowship at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, he was enabled to concentrate on a subject that we had discussed in Toronto and to present his findings in a very useful book, published in 1943, *The Political Meeting Places of the Greeks.*] He was interested in prehistory to begin with, worked with Blegen on the Palace of Nestor, and was the actual finder of the two-hundred-odd linear B tablets found in the ruins of the palace, but then for his own work he chose to organize a survey of the southwestern Peloponnese, setting an example that's regarded now as a role model for the exercise of surveying an area with concentration on the central settlement in the area; this has proven a very effective approach. As I think I said earlier, it has led even to cooperation between American scholars and Russian scholars in the Crimea area.

Another of my latest students at Toronto was Carl A. Roebuck, who went to Chicago for his graduate studies and later was very active as a member of the American School at Athens both in administration and in excavation and publication at Corinth.

[In my final two years at Toronto (1946–1947), I had the pleasure of supervising the Ph.D. dissertation of Frederick F. Winter, on Greek fortification.



Winter has since published extensively on various aspects of Greek architecture and has spent most of his academic career at Toronto.]

SMITH: Before we move on, in terms of Canada, did you have anything to do with helping the German refugee scholars who wound up in Canada find places to teach or get settled? A number of them were in prison camp at Farnham in Quebec.

THOMPSON: Yes, that's right. My wife Dorothy had much more to do with them than I, since I was overseas at the time. It is true that a number of young German scholars, all of them I think men—no, there were some women also, but in Toronto we saw only men—found themselves in England, studying, on the outbreak of war. Several of them, most of them probably, had some Jewish blood, all were anti-Nazi, and that is why they were away from their homeland. They came under . . . well, observation, in England, and it was thought that they should be sent across to the U.S.A. or to Canada for the duration, but it was on very generous and easy terms, so that those of them who were already started on academic careers were allowed to establish relations with universities in Canada.

Several of them chose to continue their work at the University of Toronto, and it was there that we met them. One in particular, Martin Ostwald, who was already well along in classical studies, attended courses on classical art and archaeology that Dorothy was giving at that time, in the war years. It was soon evident that he was a first-rate scholar, and he rose high in his profession. After taking



his B.A. at Toronto he did his graduate studies at Chicago and Columbia, and thereafter, most of his academic career he has spent at Swarthmore College. He rose in the councils of the American Philological Association to the presidency, which is of course the top honor in the world of ancient philology in this country. He also has resumed relations with England, taking an active part in the editing of the new edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History*.

Ostwald established a good working relationship with the late Russell Meiggs, who was in those days a leading historian of the classical world, Greece especially, at Oxford, and known worldwide. They hit it off very well, so much so that they arranged an exchange of positions; that is, every now and then Russell Meiggs would come to Swarthmore for a year and Martin Ostwald would go to Oxford for that year—they just exchanged courses—and this was a mark of high distinction for Ostwald. Well, we have kept up the association with the Ostwalds for a very long time. Martin has long since retired, and he and his wife Lore live on in Swarthmore. They come over pretty well every month and have dinner with us. This is one of my wife's chief pleasures in life now, renewing these old, old acquaintances.

There's another of that same group here in Princeton, a man by the name of William Heckscher, who works in the medieval period, chiefly on the literature, but he's much interested also in medieval art. He also studied at Toronto and moved on to one good position after another in American universities. He had studied under





Erwin Panofsky in Germany, and he kept up his relationship with Panofsky throughout his life. Though long since retired, he still lives here in Princeton together with his wife [Roxanne Heckscher], who was a secretary [to Panofsky] here at the Institute. Heckscher continues to be active and writes a good deal. He turned out to be a remote relative of my wife Dorothy; there's a Heckscher strain in her family, which makes for a sort of double relationship. [laughter] Yes, both Canada and the U.S.A. have profited enormously from these distinguished scholars, whose going was a loss to Germany, of course.

SMITH: Did you have a farm when you were living in Ontario?

THOMPSON: Yes, we had a small farm, of forty-five acres, about fifty miles east of Toronto. It was poor land. Most of it was rented out as pasturage to neighboring farmers, but we got down there for occasional weekends, and at times we were there through the summer. Then during the war my mother and father settled there and made themselves a small, separate cottage. That resulted in a very happy association of my elderly parents with Dorothy and our children. It was a time when the family was most compact and saw most of each other. Our plot of land was adjacent to that of the man who had sought me out in Athens when they were looking for a classical archaeologist for Toronto. He too had a nearby country place.

We were adjacent also to an experimental farm, a government tree nursery. During the war, Dorothy, among other things, conceived the idea of starting a



plantation of Christmas trees. She had several thousand miniature Christmas trees set out. We never saw them to maturity, but I suppose now they have become quite a profitable part of the farm. We sold the place to a Dutch couple who were already much interested in the bulb business, and they have now established a countrywide business in bulbs.

SMITH: How did you have time to be a teacher, a practicing archaeologist, and also a farmer?

THOMPSON: Well, I dispute the attribution of "farmer." No, I was not a serious farmer. During my time in Toronto at any rate, all the land was rented for pasturage to neighboring farmers. I had very little to do about the management of it. But it was a pleasant retreat; it was on the edge of a very nice little old village called Orono in the province of Ontario, and it was pleasant to get away there.

SMITH: How did the invitation to come to Princeton develop, and why did you decide to accept it?

THOMPSON: I expect it came about through my previous relationship with Benjamin Meritt. There was a very special relationship between Meritt and the spiritual founder of the Institute for Advanced Study, Abraham Flexner. I should say that there have been three holders of the professorship in archaeology in the Institute. The first was Ernst Herzfeld, who occupied this room. He was a Near Eastern archaeologist, especially noted for his work on Persepolis, but also active throughout



the Near East. He was succeeded by a woman, Hetty Goldman, a Bryn Mawr graduate. She also had studied at Harvard and did splendid work on the prehistory of Greece and also of Turkey, at Tarsus. She was appointed to the professorship, and it was here that she did her three-volume work on ancient Tarsus, which she had excavated; that was a very useful piece of work. She had quite a number of young people working with her and for her. She and Dorothy are congenial. As a matter of fact, Dorothy had been a member of her excavation staff at Eutresis, in Boeotia, way back in 1923-24, so that was a very pleasant relationship. Then Hetty became emerita, and they looked around for another person, and that was just the time when there was a need for someone to look after the Agora. Leslie Shear had served as field director from the beginning, 1930, until his death in 1945. He had a very strenuous time throughout the war, especially in connection with the Greek War Relief.

After serving as acting director for a couple of years, when excavation was resumed in 1947 I was formally appointed Field Director of the Agora excavations, a position I held until 1968. At the same time I found myself chairman of the Department of Art and Archaeology in the University of Toronto, and that too was very much a full-time position, so I had to decide between the two. Well, it was a hard choice to make because I had been cofounder of the department in Toronto and had also been on the Agora excavation from the beginning. I felt, however, that my





prior commitment was to the Agora excavations, and though I was pressed to stay on in Toronto and undertake the direction of the whole museum, when the invitation came from the Institute for Advanced Study, I decided to accept it.

SMITH: Did it come out of the blue?

THOMPSON: It came very much out of the blue, yes, and I suspect it was instigated by Benjamin Meritt, because we had come to know each other well over the years, before the war and during the war, in connection with the Agora. So I accepted and came to Princeton in 1947.

SMITH: With the proviso that you'd spend half the year here and half the year in Athens?

THOMPSON: That was the original undertaking, yes, and it was accepted and observed throughout.

SMITH: When you came, and in the first ten years or so, how was the historical department organized?

THOMPSON: Well, it wasn't known as the School of Historical Studies then; it was known as the School of Humanistic Studies. In 1949 the name was changed to the School of Historical Studies.

At a certain point the trustees began to feel that however good the Institute might be as an academic center, it wasn't doing its part in the study of matters relevant to contemporary life. They began to feel that we should have some school or



branch that was relevant to modern life, and so they conceived the idea of a school of social studies. As I recall the idea originated with the trustees. They, in appointing a new director of the Institute, chose a man who was prepared to carry out their policy. This met with a fair amount of opposition, especially from the senior members of the other schools, and it was an unpleasant period in the history of the Institute because it became a rather acrimonious matter. Eventually and naturally the trustees and the director won out, and the new School of Social Science was born.

SMITH: How did you feel about the question?

THOMPSON: On the whole I thought it was a good idea, and I think it has worked out very well. The advocates were fortunate I think in their very first appointment, Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist who already had an established academic record, and who was a first-rate man in his own field, with wide interests, but his own scholarship centered very largely on two areas, the Dutch East Indies—he was of Dutch origin himself—and North Africa. Most of his writings, especially his early writings, were based on autopsy, his personal experience in those countries. This appealed to an archaeologist—the insistence on firsthand acquaintance with the material that you were working on.

Clifford Geertz had a good successor in a woman, the second woman to be a full professor here, Joan Scott. She has done good work, I think, especially in view of the troubled beginnings of that school. Her own particular interest happens to be



historical. She's especially interested in labor relations in France, from the eighteenth century on, so she has provided a very good link between the School of Historical Studies and the new School of Social Science. She has been very ready, like Geertz before her, to cooperate with the School of Historical Studies.

They have always invited members of the School of Historical Studies to share in their weekly get-togethers. They take lunch regularly on Thursdays, and we are invited to join them and take part in the discussion. There is always a paper, usually given by a member of that school, but we are also invited to give papers if we wish. It's a short, formal paper, usually about twenty minutes, followed by discussion. This is a good part of our practice here, these fairly regular discussion groups. We have something similar also in historical studies, but we are not so receptive to members of the other schools. Some of the members of the School of Historical Studies do attend fairly regularly. There is another old seminar here, in astrophysics. That has always been a subject of great interest at the Institute, as also at Princeton University, and on Tuesdays the scholars in this field from the University and the Institute get together for lunch and discussion, and that's a very valuable link between the Institute and the University.

SMITH: Among the scholars here, who have you been closest to, in terms of discussing your work, and have you found the interaction to be a stimulating and important part of the development of your thinking about the Agora?



THOMPSON: Perhaps the first and the closest was Benjamin Meritt. He, from the beginning of the excavation, had been held officially and formally responsible for the study and publication of all the Greek inscriptions found in the excavations. That was a reality. During his term of office, as long as he was a professor here, and as long as I was director of the excavations, he did the initial publication of all the inscriptions that came out. The excavations have yielded well over seven thousand inscriptions, which in many areas have had a great impact on our knowledge of the history of Athens. We had a great many points of interest in common. He would consult me about the purely archaeological aspects of a given inscription and I would likewise call on him if it came to the use of the new epigraphic evidence or the ancient literary evidence. So that was a very intimate and very valuable relationship.

Meritt's great work on the Athenian tribute lists was one of the most extensive and valuable undertakings in the field of purely classical studies in our time. It was done very largely here, at the Institute. Professor Meritt was able to bring here to Princeton his two collaborators, Professor H. T. Wade-Gery of Oxford University, and Professor Malcolm McGregor, who spent years at the University of Cincinnati and subsequently at the University of British Columbia. Meritt would bring them here for a term or two terms, as Visiting Members, and they would work together at a furious pace on this great project: the editing and publication of the inscriptions on the Acropolis in Athens, recording the contributions of the many subject states to





Athens as the leader of the Delian Confederacy. The imperial tribute was a tremendously important factor in Athenian economics through most of the fifth century B.C. The annotated publication of the surviving parts was really a tremendous piece of scholarship. It is the standard work on the subject and always will be. So there again we had people whom we could consult about many of our problems, especially of course about the interpretation of the newly found inscriptions. We found bits and pieces of the tribute lists even down our way in the Agora excavations.

[I have found Christian Habicht another very valuable colleague. Coming to us in 1973 from Heidelberg, he already had a high reputation for his use of inscriptions in the study of ancient history, notably in his treatment of the ruler cult in ancient Greece. On coming to the Institute, he has concentrated on the history of Athens and its international relations in the Hellenistic period. A long series of articles has culminated in a volume: *Athen: Die Geschichte der Stadt in Hellenistischer Zeit* (1995). The book is a model of its kind and an English version by Harvard is imminent.

One of the liveliest of my colleagues in ancient history is Glen Bowersock, who came to us from Harvard in 1980. He can talk and write with equal wit and wisdom about Edward Gibbon, Julian the Apostate, or Martin Bernal, champion of the *Black Athena*. I have profited greatly from his studies of the impact of Rome on



Greece, the impact of Hellenism on the Near East, even of the Arabs.

Another congenial colleague among the "ancients" in the early years of my membership was Professor Harold Cherniss, who came to us in 1948 from Johns Hopkins. He was a leading student of Greek philosophy and always willing to help in the interpretation of a passage or in the assessment of a new book.

These were the colleagues with whom I had fairly close and regular contact. But the School of Historical Studies in my time has been rich in the remarkable number of eminent scholars in a wide variety of fields, and the setup of the Institute is such as to make contact easy and natural.]

SMITH: We have done a lot of interviews concerning Erwin Panofsky, and even though he's not in the same field that you're in, I would like to ask if you have any observations about Panofsky as a member of the Institute. Secondly, considering the importance of the classical tradition to the Warburgian method, and to Panofsky's method, what are your feelings about how well the Warburgians actually understood what the classical world was?

THOMPSON: Well, Panofsky was a very remarkable person, as you know, and he was pretty thoroughly at home in the world of classical literature, classical philosophy, and classical mythology especially, of course, so that his opinion had to be respected. Although he had matured in Germany at a time when the *Herr Professor* expected to be rated little below God Almighty, he was a very stirring



person to have around. It was a great pleasure to spend an evening with the two Panofskys. She [Dora Panofsky] was almost his equal in intelligence and wit. A third member of that group was Peter [Heinrich] von Blanckenhagen; they were great friends and got along very well together. Occasionally Dorothy and I would share an evening with them, and I never listened to more brilliant conversation in all my life. It was scintillating. The views expressed were not always convincing, but they were always stimulating. Panofsky used to consult me occasionally on matters of purely classical-archaeological interest, but we soon discovered that he knew as much as I did about the monuments with which he was concerned, and had worked and studied them thoroughly; that is, insofar as he could from the literary side. He really was a scholar of international standing.

He was in great demand as you know as a lecturer and as a teacher in many institutions in this country and abroad. You always felt that great things were going on in his presence. He was very close to William Heckscher, the young man we had come to know long before, up in Toronto. They were really very close and had been all their lives. So Heckscher was a sort of link between us and Panofsky. Panofsky was a familiar figure in the faculty here. He was a lonely man in some ways. He loved his dog, and he used to observe that the dog merited recognition.

[Tape V, Side One]

THOMPSON: Panofsky would often observe that we know from the Bible that God





created first a man, and not being entirely happy with that creation he had another try and created woman. Even woman didn't satisfy him, nor the combination of man and woman, so he had a third try and he created the dog. Then he was satisfied!

Panofsky said that he did his best thinking in the company of his dog. He and his splendid red setter spent many hours strolling up and down the paths in the Institute woods back there. [laughter] There was something in that. It's like the appointment to the Institute—we are expected to do nothing but sit and think. The sitting can be easily controlled, but the thinking not so easily. [laughter] We can only accept Panofsky's word.

SMITH: Did you have any connections with Ernst Kantorowicz?

THOMPSON: Some connections, yes. We greatly admired his courage in leaving the University of California, which he did over the business of the loyalty oath. I didn't follow it in detail, but I felt that there was a good deal of justification for his resentment of the ruling. I had come to know him indirectly already from his great book, one of his earliest publications, namely *Frederick II*. When I was down during the war years in south Italy and stationed at Bari (1943–1946), knowing this to have been the country of Frederick II, I had a copy of Kantorowicz's book sent to me. That was a real experience, reading so much about Frederick II in his homeland, because on every side one could see the results of his work and of his wide interests. I read the book with great interest and was very glad eventually to make the acquaintance of



the author. I must say that I haven't read *The King's Two Bodies*[: *A Study in Medieval Political Theology*] book in full, nor have I read any of his subsequent volumes from beginning to end, but we had a good many talks, and an occasional dinner together.

Kantorowicz was really a splendid cook, and he took very great interest in preparing a dinner. It was quite an experience to be a guest at one of his dinner parties. They were usually small parties of six or eight people at the most—usually only six. He would do all the preparatory work, the shopping and the cooking, as well as playing host, and these were great occasions. He also served the best wines, and it was something to share in one of these evening parties. He eventually gave up the practice after some years because he said it took too long. He said, "If you are going to entertain you had better do it on a proper basis, and for me that takes three days out of my week: a day of preparation, shopping and so on, a day to prepare the table and the actual goodies, and a day to recover from all this." [laughter] So he gave up the practice.

He lived in one of the fine old Greek Revival houses of the early nineteenth century on Alexander Street. The Institute owned the house for a time, and several Institute people have lived there subsequently. Well, he was very stimulating to have around, and I suppose did much of his most important work right here as a member of this community.



SMITH: What was the tenor of your relationships with the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton?

THOMPSON: They have always been congenial. The Institute owed a great debt to the University from the very beginning, notably of course in the School of Mathematics, which borrowed a couple of its most distinguished early members from the University. A similar relationship developed in Physics and Astrophysics. For many years the astronomers and astrophysicists of the University have come to the Institute for lunch on Tuesdays.

My own personal relations were closer with the classicists than with the Department of Art and Archaeology. [Conditions on both sides were propitious in the earliest years of the Institute. Abraham Flexner, the first director, was a staunch believer in the classics. He was proud to recall, I remember, that his first salaried position was as a teacher of Latin. It was natural that he should know and admire Professor Edward Capps, the dynamic figure who for many years was chairman of the classics department in Princeton University, and at the same time chairman of the Managing Committee of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. After retiring from his university professorship, Capps was for five years a member of the Institute.] There was also a close relationship between Capps and Benjamin Meritt, who, in large part due to his reputation as a member of the Agora staff, was chosen in 1935 as one of the earliest members of the School of Historical Studies.



On becoming a professor in the Institute, Meritt retained his close relations with the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, especially as an active member of the staff of the Agora excavations, but also for a time with overall responsibility for the publication program of the American School. He was later relieved of this last responsibility by his wife, Dr. Lucy Shoe Meritt, who, as an honorary member of the Institute, also held the position of Editor of the American School for many years and with great distinction. At the same time she kept up her worldwide ranking as an authority on classical architecture.

But to get back to our relations with Princeton's Department of Art and Archaeology, we are invited not only to special occasions but also to their regular seminars on Fridays around a brown-bag lunch table. Visitors from the Institute are sometimes invited to lead the discussion on topics of their choosing, and the discussion is usually lively.

The classicists and ancient historians of the Institute have held comparable though somewhat more formal seminars. One series was started in the early days by Professor Andrew Alföldi and myself. We met in this room, which had projection equipment until it became too small. Then we moved to an auditorium in the West Building where we could accommodate guests from Princeton University, Rutgers, Bryn Mawr, and occasionally from New York.

Such seminars have continued, with changing formats. Nowadays the





possibility for get-togethers has been increased by the designation of a central table in the dining hall as a meeting place for classicists, especially on Wednesdays.

Let me add here that Princeton University has given us virtually free rein in their libraries. This has been an invaluable privilege, especially in the early days.

SMITH: The Institute for Advanced Study was set up for the pursuit of pure intellectual life, without any necessity of teaching. I was wondering if you could define your concept of who the intellectual is and why intellectuals might be important.

THOMPSON: [That is a big and complex question. In the present context the term "intellectual" is commonly used in reference to the scholar who is concerned primarily with adding to our stock of knowledge in a given field by research, as contrasted with the teacher, whose mission is to familiarize himself with the current state of our knowledge and to pass that on to the next generation. The ideal, of course, is a combination of the two.

In the case of archaeology or art history, we add to our stock of knowledge by carrying out an excavation or by concentrated observation in art galleries or museums. In either case this should be followed by a period of intensive study of the new evidence. Here comes the rub, since with most scholars teaching takes up the time needed for such study. And it is right here that an appointment at the Institute, whether at the faculty or visitor level plays a vital role by allowing one to "do nothing



but sit and think."

Abraham Flexner, when asked why he chose Albert Einstein as the first professor at the Institute, replied that it was 1) because Einstein was universally regarded as a very great scholar, 2) because he asked for no more equipment than a desk, a blackboard, and plenty of paper, and 3) because he was out of a job. Nowadays, to be sure, an applicant for a professorship would probably ask for more equipment, but in fact the Institute even today is strikingly devoid of laboratories or mechanical equipment of any kind. The building in which Professor John von Neumann did his final research on the great modern computer was a striking exception, and it is now used for administrative purposes. Other colleagues, especially in natural science, have close connections with great laboratories or observatories independent of the Institute.]

I have no laboratory, but I had for long participated in an excavation, which might be regarded as my laboratory. I did my scholarly work here and my laboratory work, so to speak, in Athens. I think that was a very good combination. I should say too that the Institute has been very generous and I think perhaps wise, in allowing members its faculty to go away for a term or a year and give lectures, or teach a regular term or a year elsewhere, and pretty well all my colleagues in the School of Historical Studies have done that. I did it repeatedly. I was out in California one term, at the University of California, Berkeley. I taught at Columbia University for



one term. I taught at Princeton University repeatedly, usually for a single term, giving graduate courses, and then I spent a year as the Eastman visiting professor at Oxford University, a term at the University of Aberdeen in northern Scotland, a term down in Sydney, Australia, as a visiting professor, which gave me a good view both of the academic world of Australia and of New Zealand, and so on, elsewhere for shorter periods. I have profited greatly from this experience and I think in general people in our school at least have had a similar experiences. It diminishes the image of this place as an ivory tower and enables us to keep in touch with the normal university community and with the young people coming on.

SMITH: Did you direct any dissertations?

THOMPSON: Very few, very few. I directed several at the University of Toronto, but not since coming here. Though I've not directed them, I've consulted with many of the writers of dissertations here at Princeton.

SMITH: I'd like to shift back to Athens and the Agora. In 1947 you become full director, the successor to Leslie Shear, Sr. Had you been involved with budgetary questions prior to then?

THOMPSON: Not much. No, I'm no good at finances, whether private or public.

SMITH: But as director, certainly you had to start worrying about the excavation project's budget, didn't you?

THOMPSON: Yes, yes. Though again, I leaned a great deal on others, and





fortunately throughout I've had very close cooperation from other members of the School community, with the Chairman of the Managing Committee, the President of the Trustees, and the Director of the School. One thing that I had to raise money for early on in my directorship was the reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos II, which our responsible advisers assured us would cost around \$2 million—to restore the ancient building and do the necessary landscaping around it. Well, that seemed an awful lot of money at that time. Now it seems almost trivial. An idea came up as we sat at tea one afternoon in the Agora.

We were required by Greek law to provide a museum for the permanent storage and display of the finds from the excavation, and it was to be located on the site. We had laid out a lot of money to purchase an extra bit of land to the west of the Areopagus where we thought we might build a modern museum. It seemed to be well outside the Agora proper, and it was approved by the Greek government. So we bought the land—paid handsomely for it—and carried out the excavation, which was a costly business because the stratified overburden was enormously deep.

When we got down to bottom we found that the place was so littered with the remains of important ancient structures that we had to give up the idea of using it as a site for a museum. There was a Mycenaean tomb, there was a family burial plot of the sixth century B.C., and there were traces of ancient workshops all around, and so on. Nevertheless, before that idea was completely abandoned, we had had an



architect design a modern museum that fitted into that place, but it didn't please any of us and proved absolutely repugnant to the board of trustees when they were presented with drawings of it. So we had to abandon that notion. We realized that we had to find another solution for this basic problem, and we were discussing it one afternoon just as we sat at the usual informal tea, after the close of fieldwork. Several of us had talked informally long before of restoring the Stoa of Attalos II, just for its own sake. Then suddenly, I think if I remember right it was Mabel Lang of Bryn Mawr College who said we should pick up this old idea and use the restored Stoa of Attalos as a museum and a base of operations. And that seemed good to the group gathered around the tea table.

I took it up with the director of the School, Professor Gorham Stevens, who had done his great work on the publication of the Erechtheum and had been very much interested in the Agora project from the beginning. I found it appealed greatly to him, and he prepared restored drawings of the building, and exciting perspective views of it that were tremendously helpful in selling the idea to others back home. I had to present it to the board of trustees of the School, among whom was Ward Canaday, the father of Doreen Canaday and the head of the Overland Company, which produced the Jeep. He was not without means. As the father of a student of archaeology from Bryn Mawr College who had visited Greece repeatedly, he was a very vigorous chairman of the board of trustees at that time. He took to the idea



pretty well at once. Its sheer magnitude and the challenge of its high cost appealed to him! [laughter] The chairman of the Managing Committee of the School, Charles Morgan, voted for it, and the director of the School, John Caskey, came out in support of it, although rather gingerly. He said, "This is too much for us to undertake, why don't we put up just a half or a quarter of the building?" But I soon discovered, and felt from the beginning, that a partial restoration was less likely to appeal than the reconstruction of the whole building, however expensive that might be.

Eventually we decided to go back to Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who had supported the excavation up till that time, to ask whether he could help us also on meeting this requirement of our original agreement with the Greek government, namely the provision of an adequate museum. He realized the necessity of this. As I mentioned the other day, he had very intimate knowledge of what went on in Williamsburg, with his financial support. For that reason in large part I think, he took a real personal interest in what was by his standards our small undertaking in Athens. We gave him the figures, and he said, "I'll give you the first million if you'll raise the second million." We accepted that, and Ward Canaday, as the person responsible financially in the School, said, "Fine, go ahead and accept that offer from Mr. Rockefeller."

Canaday set to himself in a very personal way and began to solicit funds for



the other million. In a surprisingly short time it was done. I'm afraid he twisted the arms of a good many of his business colleagues, but they set an example, and contributions did come in from organizations and individuals all over this country and Canada, and from the Greeks. I remember a rather touching contribution from a Greek police officer's benevolent association, or rather from the officers' wives. Various Greek commercial firms contributed to the work. The Achaia Clauss wine company, for instance, which is largely responsible for some of the most popular wines drunk throughout Greece, undertook to pay for the furnishing and the setting up of one room in the restored Stoa, in which were demonstrated the uses of ancient wine jars. So it was a very international affair, and the second million was raised quite quickly, within a couple of years, and we were able to set to on the reconstruction.

Another example of what happened in my time, and in which I had some fairly direct responsibility, was the acquisition in the late 1950s of some additional properties on the east and north sides of the excavation, outside the original formal limits. This was going to cost something of the order of \$200,000. Well, I presented the picture to Charles Morgan, who was then chairman of the Managing Committee. He at that time was a professor still at Amherst College and very much interested in the whole Agora project. He said, "Let me resume talks with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. He talked with them, and they came over with the necessary money,





something over \$200,000. From its beginning, in 1930, the Agora project has enjoyed many benefactions. In addition to the support of the American School itself, it has received contributions from many individuals, corporations, and foundations. None has been more generous than the Rockefellers: Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. I used to talk with their representatives in Athens, to present our needs, but the actual handling of the money was almost all done by the officers at the School, I mean it was on the books of the School. No, I'm really no good at all about actually handling money.

SMITH: It does seem, particularly after 1960, that the budget of the School was having constant problems. Did that affect the decisions about how much work you could do?

THOMPSON: Yes, it did in a way. I tried to leave things in fair shape for my successor. I retired in 1968 from the directorship. The next move was to find the money to clear the north edge of the Agora, and my successor would have to get going on that, because we'd pretty well completed the basic clearance of the rest of the area and money had to be found. We had had a visit from Mr. John J. McCloy several years before this, at a time when he was still the United States High Commissioner in Germany. That had been a very strenuous occupation for several years. He came down to Athens incognito to spend a short holiday. He was there a week or ten days. He had had a good classical education, partly at the Peddie School



at Hightstown, New Jersey, and then subsequently at Amherst College. So he had heard something about our work in Athens, and he spent much of his time in Greece down at the Agora, going around the site and talking with us, spending the tea hour with us. I remember Alison Frantz took him up to Delphi for a weekend, and that was a memorable experience for both of them; they often referred to it.

Ancient history still meant something to Mr. McCloy. He had shown such an active interest in the ongoing process that I suggested when I got back that fall that he be invited to join the board of the American School in Athens. He was invited to join it, he accepted, and before long he was made treasurer. Then the need came up for something of the order of \$2 million for the financing of the work along the north side, and this was discussed at a meeting of the board. By that time McCloy was head of the Ford Foundation. Well, he said, "Why don't you put this up to the Ford Foundation? I'll be glad to support it." I pointed out that the Ford Foundation had never given a nickel to any archaeological enterprise; they were too hardheaded for that. He said to go ahead. I said, "This is a lot of money, \$2 million." And he said, "Don't hesitate; ask for that." Well, we did ask for it, and we were given \$1 million. He was very embarrassed by this. [laughter] I tried to comfort him, pointing out that it was the first time the Ford Foundation had given anything at all to archaeology. But as long as he held the office of treasurer of the American School's board, he took a very active interest in its affairs, and he was a great man. I was able to pass that



million dollars on to my successor, Leslie Shear, Jr., who also established very good working relations with the people out in California, the computer people.

LYONS: Oh, Hewlett Packard.

THOMPSON: Hewlett Packard, yes. David Packard, the son of the founder of the company, had majored in classics at Harvard, and he was also very much interested in the beginnings of the computer. He then became a member of the Hewlett Packard board. He was very sympathetic toward our work in Athens, and he was well known to Leslie Shear, Jr. They hit it off very well, and for years the foundation has pretty well supported the cost of the actual excavating in Athens. The additional cost of maintaining the Agora headquarters there has had to be financed in other ways, through the School's budget.

SMITH: Was there in any way competition with the Corinth excavation for resources—either internally or externally?

THOMPSON: Not much. They have had their financial supporters, apart from those who have helped with the work in Athens. Our sources are more or less independent of one another. In recent years they have had a very good supporter in the director of the Corinth excavation, Charles Williams, who comes from a very wealthy family. He has been able to contribute his own services in many ways, and to go far beyond that in the construction of new and necessary facilities there. It was he who financed the setting up of a new chair at the University of Pennsylvania especially for the history of





ancient architecture. No, there has been rivalry in many ways, but I think it's just a very good healthy rivalry between two parts of the same institution.

SMITH: Did the Fulbright Act have any effect in terms of increasing the numbers of people that you had to work on the excavation?

THOMPSON: They were tremendously helpful to us in the Agora, and for years we had at least one Fulbright scholar on our staff. I remember one season when we had as many as five Fulbright scholars on our Agora excavation staff. Alison Frantz was active in Fulbright affairs in Athens. For three years she was the cultural attaché in Athens and a very useful link between the embassy, the School, and the Agora excavations. Yes, that was a great program. We had the pleasure of welcoming Senator Fulbright himself at the excavations at one time, and it was a great pleasure meeting him.

SMITH: One of the aftereffects of World War II and the growth of government funding for education was the rapid increase in the number of students who were going into higher education, and also a change in their economic and class backgrounds. Particularly in art history we see that there's a shift from people of means to people who don't have means. Was something similar happening in archaeology?

THOMPSON: Oh yes, very much so. So that nowadays pretty well anyone who engages in archaeological activity that takes him abroad at any rate, has to have



outside support, yes. We're tremendously grateful to the NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] especially, occasionally the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts], but many of our undertakings have been supported by the NEH.

SMITH: What kind of decisions did you face in terms of deciding the order and the priority of excavations within the Agora site? Were there any debates over what to do first? I presume that you wanted to do everything eventually, but you couldn't do it all at once.

THOMPSON: No, in a purely practical way, the sequence of priorities became fairly obvious as we moved along. We all knew the total area to be dealt with. The treatment of the north side was the most difficult, and there's some difficulty still about that. You see, originally our limit on the north was set in an arbitrary way by the line of the Athens-Piraeus Railway, but when we had cleared everything south of that, it became obvious that we did not yet have the northern limit of the ancient Agora square, that we'd have to dig beyond, to the north of the railway, and that meant going out beyond the original limit set on our area. So this, as I said earlier, meant an extension of our field of operation in that northward direction, and that required negotiation, which is still going on. Leslie Shear, Jr., has had to do a certain amount of negotiation there, as the north side has developed and opened up under his direction. There are still basic problems there that'll have to be worked out.

Personally, I should like to see a little of the north side, i.e., some of the



modern buildings on the north side, left standing. I think we could gather enough evidence for the ancient form of things there by digging in backyards and so on, but there, as it happens, just north of the railway, there's a nice row of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century buildings—a very good sample of the hundreds of the buildings of that period that we have had to demolish. It gives a very nice northern limit for the eastern half of the north side, and a very good specimen, as I say, of what had once covered a very large area there. But this is something for the future; the matter has still to be discussed and settled.

SMITH: I'd like to come back to the question of the Stoa of Attalos II. You use both the word "restore" and "rebuild," and to me they mean two very different things. How much of the original building did you actually have?

THOMPSON: Oh, we had a great deal of it. The foundations were all intact, and at two points, one at the north end and one at the south end, the walls still stood to their full original height. The front steps were still there at the south end, and there were hundreds of blocks from the original fabric of the Stoa, lying on the site—hundreds and hundreds of them. Between the parts that still stood and these loose lying blocks there was, one might say, complete evidence for the structural restoration of the building.

SMITH: Including interior decoration?

THOMPSON: There wasn't much painted decoration, but for the carved ornament,



yes, there was plenty of evidence for that. We do know that there was painted decoration on the parapet between the columns of the upper story in front, but there was very little trace of color elsewhere in the building. Color was not as prominent apparently in the architecture of the Hellenistic period as it had been in archaic and classical times. In any case, its use in the Stoa of Attalos was minimal.

We all realized that this was a very serious matter—how far one should go in the restoration of an ancient building. And it continues to be a very contentious matter in Greece, especially. From the beginning of course we had to confer with our Greek colleagues in the department of antiquities. At that time the head man was Professor Anastasios Orlandos, who was a very good student of ancient architecture and a very great figure in the Polytechnion. He was the Professor of Architecture in Athens, and for years and years he had been a very responsible figure in the Department of Antiquities and also in the Archaeological Society, which is a private organization that has done a great deal of archaeological work in Greece. So we had to confer with him about the first basic decision as to whether we might restore the building and how far we might go in rebuilding it.

[Tape V, Side Two]

THOMPSON: As I mentioned, it was our written obligation to provide a permanent museum. We had failed to find any space within the rest of the excavated area for a building of adequate size to serve that purpose, and we were all agreed that this





museum should be on or very close to the excavated site. We eventually persuaded Orlandos to agree that this obligation had to be observed, and that the Stoa of Attalos provided an adequate solution for it. He was never very happy about its use primarily as a museum and base of operations, but eventually he came to recognize that it would serve those purposes adequately. He had supervised a great deal of restoration elsewhere, all over Greece—ancient buildings, churches, monasteries, and so on. It had been his practice to insert in the restored building, if it was a matter of restoration, pretty well all of the ancient material that was available there.

In the beginning he argued strongly in favor of doing this in the Stoa of Attalos II, and we had long, informal discussions; then one day we had a formal meeting on the spot, with Professor Orlandos present, and representatives of the other foreign schools. Someone raised the question of how much of the ancient material should be inserted. Well, Professor Orlandos said, "I believe you should insert all the ancient material that you have found here"—hundreds and hundreds of blocks. Then someone said, "But Professor Orlandos, if you do that you will have to put them together as you would put pieces of meat together for roasting purposes. How could you be sure that this would be strong enough?" Remember that this building was to be used for practical purposes.

There was a good deal of argument on both sides. Eventually the decision went in favor of keeping down the insertion of ancient material to a minimum. The



final decision, which [Orlandos] had to sign, was that we should retain as much as remained of the ancient structure in place, but then, in restoring the facade we should keep at the south end the three original marble steps, the anta at the southwest corner of the building, and the south half of the ancient back walls of the Stoa, which are still in situ, and over the southern four intercolumniations of the facade we should insert representative pieces of every architectural member; that is, the column, the architrave, the frieze, the cornice, and the marble roof tiles. Thus anyone entering the Stoa of Attalos must now enter through the one and only entrance, namely at the south end of the building, and he has immediately in front of him a section of the facade, in which he can clearly see and discern the difference between the ancient members and the modern additions. So there is the basic evidence on which the restoration of the facade is based.

For the rest of the facade, a vast expanse of 180 meters in length, the material will all be Pentelic marble, so that you will have a clear and undisturbed image of the front of the building as it was in antiquity. Elsewhere, notably in the Erechtheum, the modern restoration has involved sticking bits of modern marble in among the ancient blocks, here, there, and everywhere over the expanse of the wall. That's something that I, and a lot of other people feel is very distracting and disturbs one's image of the ancient building in its original form.

I've shown innumerable people around the Stoa of Attalos, and I've been



greatly impressed by the gratitude that they have repeatedly expressed over having this first-rate example of what was perhaps the most ubiquitous and most characteristic type of ancient civic building, namely the stoa, made intelligible to anyone. The evidence for the scholar is provided by the photographs of the building in the form in which we found it, readily available there in the building itself, open to the public, and we have shown it in models and in our many publications. The photographic and written records of the excavation are available in the Records Room in the upper storey of the Stoa, and all the publications relating to the building are accessible up there. If you are interested further you can buy a booklet on the Stoa of Attalos right there for a minimum charge. I think that has made the ancient evidence about as accessible as is possible, and at the same time has done justice to the ancient building, both as a very characteristic piece of Greek architecture in its developed form, and also as a readily intelligible example of the attitude of the people of the new Greek cities in Asia Minor toward the old city of Athens. I think its importance in that respect is very great indeed. Because here this is known, and we found the inscription on the front of the building, the ancient inscription indicating that this building was a gift from Attalos, the king of Pergamon, to the people of Athens. There can be no better and no more telling indication of the reality of that feeling, almost of reverence, toward the old city to which they looked for so much in their own culture.

SMITH: Yesterday, off-tape, you talked about the recent critique of the





reconstruction that's been made, and your response to that. I'm wondering if you can repeat that, forgetting that we ever heard it at all yesterday. [laughter]

THOMPSON: Well, this has been a contentious matter in Greece for a very long time and always will be; that is, how an ancient building should be treated nowadays. Oftentimes something has to be done to preserve what remains of an ancient building. In other cases, according to one school of thought, an ancient building may be converted to modern use. There's a strong feeling throughout this field—not only in Greece but in Italy and elsewhere—that in the normal restoration of an ancient building, or its preservation, the ancient fabric should be preserved as it has survived, pretty well intact, and that an absolute minimum of new material should be added or incorporated with the old. It has also been officially proclaimed by the bodies that operate in this area—notably one in Venice some twenty years ago—that any restoration that is done on an ancient building should be reversible. It should be possible to take it all apart and have another look.

SMITH: Is that the case with the Stoa of Attalos?

THOMPSON: Well, theoretically it would be possible, but it's absolutely unnecessary. Even some of our Greek colleagues have been insistent on observing these principles, even in a building that is being restored for modern use. One of the most influential in our area, Professor Charalambos Bouras, of the Athenian Polytechnion, who has done a good deal of restoration himself, has been very critical



of our restoration of the Stoa of Attalos, chiefly because of our leaving out a good deal of the ancient fabric of the building, and making the ancient evidence of its original form, as he says, inaccessible now in modern times. He did indeed describe this as a disaster; that was his word.

Well, this has taken me by surprise, because in the first place we made a great effort, oftentimes at great expense, to preserve all the surviving elements found in place in the building, and that reduced the removal of ancient elements to a half dozen blocks in the top of a wall that had suffered terribly from an ancient fire in the third century A.D. After photographing and drawing this part of the wall and after consultation with the Greek department of antiquities, we removed those blocks. Elsewhere, we have preserved all the ancient fabric, and much more. We have laid out the ancient blocks that we found lying among the ruins of the building when we took over. We have preserved them all on the site, and we have laid them out in order immediately behind the Stoa, where they are readily accessible not only to scholars but to the general public, so that one has ready access to all that form of evidence.

As for the foundations, beneath the original floor level of the building we have dug out great rooms that serve as the basic store rooms for the Agora Museum. In excavating at that deeper level we have discovered clear evidence for the basic changes in the plan of the building, in two phases. The evidence for this is in the



basements, which are readily accessible to any interested scholar, and this was previously not the case. I also pointed out to Bouras that the records for our excavation of the building are all readily available there in the Stoa.

The Greeks have been curiously indifferent to the restoration of the Stoa; they regard it as rather intrusive, you know. It was something paid for by foreigners, a foreign ruler, in antiquity, and something paid for by a foreign outfit in modern times. [laughter] The Greeks like to be thought of as absolutely dominant in this field themselves. There has been a certain amount of criticism outside Greece, but it has died down, and I have been happy to be able to talk with a good many people who were skeptical at a distance, but when they have been on the spot and seen the results, have been readily converted.

SMITH: What about questions of lighting? Did you put in modern lighting?

THOMPSON: Oh yes. Modern lighting and modern plumbing.

SMITH: So there are lavatories?

THOMPSON: Oh yes, there are indeed, and there's a cold water fountain, which we put at the north end of the building, so that to get to the cold fountain one has to go the whole length of the building and see something of the building.

SMITH: Heating?

THOMPSON: No, there's electric heating in the work rooms up above.

SMITH: Now, do the work rooms up above attempt to follow any kind of ancient



floor plan or are they just designed for working purposes?

THOMPSON: Well, let me remind you that in the original form of the building there was a row of twenty-one shops, one-room rectangular shops at the back of the building, fronted by two rows of columns, that is, a double porch, the whole length of that great building. And upstairs there was a similar arrangement: twenty-one shops looking out again through two series of columns. It was a multipurpose building in antiquity; it was a shopping center on a splendid scale, but it was also a very pleasant place to stroll and talk and gossip, especially in the morning hours before the sun got in.

It was a splendid place from which to watch the Panathenaic and other processions going up by the Panathenaic Way diagonally through the Agora. There would have been standing room on the two floors, and on the terrace, of generous width, out in front, to watch that procession, which was one of the great events in the Athenian year. I know the effectiveness of the Stoa for this purpose, because every year, on the day of the Holy Apostles, the congregation of a church nearby gathers together, forms a procession, and makes their way along the ancient Panathenaic Way to the church. We watch it each year from the Stoa of Attalos, and it's quite a splendid sight, seen from that distance. A very modest procession compared to the Panathenaic Procession, but there it is.

SMITH: In terms of its primary use as a museum, how would you compare the





museum that you put together with other museums of classical antiquities—in terms of the style of presentation? And sort of corollary to that, which museums are your favorites and which are the ones that you like the least?

THOMPSON: In the first place, through our excavating deep below the original floor level of the Stoa, we have gained enormous storage space, and it is there that one finds our basic storage—whether of marbles or of pottery. Then on the main floor are the exhibition galleries. Of the twenty-one rooms we have thrown ten of them into a single long room, which is the principal gallery in the museum. The others have been kept for office space, especially for the representative of the Ministry of Antiquities in the Greek government. We come under the jurisdiction of the director of the Acropolis, officially and formally—he needs space. Then we have reserved a couple of rooms for special purposes. In one room we illustrate the history of the wine jar and the wine trade in ancient Greece. Another room was used to illustrate the use of terra-cotta in Greek architecture and in Greek plumbing. Two others now serve as public toilets and washrooms. Those rooms were all in the space of the ancient shops, but the doorways of the ancient shops have all been restored so that you're not aware of the different purposes of these various areas.

The study part of the museum is on the upper floor, where you find the work rooms, the drafting room, the photographic department, the numismatic department, and small displays of characteristic groups of pottery found together, which have to



be shown together for the specialist—material that is not of interest to the general public but has to be kept readily available to scholars who are working in the study section upstairs.

SMITH: Is the whole second story open to the air as the first story is?

THOMPSON: Yes, except for the back part of it over most of its length, which is fenced off by a plastic screen, reaching right up. Up there we have placed the models of the Agora, and of the Acropolis, and it's a splendid place to stand and look out over the excavation, standing beside the model of the whole place. In general it has worked well from the point of view of the scholar. I think scholars in general feel that it's one of the best places to get at what you need to know about an excavation easily, because you have this museum right alongside the ancient excavation, and you have there in one place literally everything that was found in that excavation, even the material that had been found by the Greek archaeologists before we took over. The great statue of Apollo Patroos, for instance, which was found long ago, was given back by the National Museum to the Stoa of Attalos and it stands there within sight of the temple where it stood.

We have also displayed a lot of the important inscriptions of general interest; we've been able to set them up in clear view of where they stood in antiquity. The anti-tyranny decree, for instance, the decree passed in 338 B.C. stating very clearly that anyone who rose up against the present form of democratic government in



Athens with a view to establishing a dictatorship shall be regarded as worthy of death. This has meant something to every Greek visitor, and to most foreign visitors as well, because it's a complete stele standing there in the Stoa of Attalos to be read by everyone. Then, as I've said before, upstairs you find all of the field notebooks, the photographic records, all the catalogs, and so on. So everything relating to the excavation is readily available there on the spot.

LYONS: So it's contextual. I think that's one of its strengths.

THOMPSON: Yes, and when I was arguing for the restoration of the building that was one aspect of it that I kept emphasizing, and the practicality of it in that way was pretty well obvious to everyone. It gives you much of the evidence relating to the functions of government that went on there in the Agora, notably the law courts. We have a lot of the furnishings of the law courts, and deep beneath the Stoa of Attalos we've come on the foundations of a series of buildings of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. that can be identified now with assurance as some of the many law courts of ancient Athens, these dating from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. We have sculptures from the buildings that stood there, notably from the Stoa of Zeus.

We also have displayed a great deal of material relating to the private life that went on all around the Agora. We've found evidence of the way in which they made their pottery and cast their statues. We've found the remains of a half-dozen shops where bronze statues were cast in antiquity. These are all displayed now in full view





of the area where they were found, and that I think means something. Corinth is fortunate in having a good museum, but you're not so conscious of its relationship to the site. It seems to me that here in Athens, where the civic life was perhaps a little more active than at Corinth, it means a great deal to have the site so closely related with the furnishings of the site.

LYONS: A number of other museums in Athens are in part, or sometimes entirely formed of private collections. There are some wonderful materials in the Benaki Museum, and some specific groupings in the National Museum, but I wonder if you have time to talk about some of the Greek private collectors that you may have known, and in fact even up to the more recent establishment of the Goulandris Collection of Early Cycladic Art.

THOMPSON: Yes, that's a subject in itself. The National Museum, as you know very well, is the repository for antiquities found all over Greece, so that there's no attempt of course at relating the exhibitions in the National Museum to their context, but it is one of the great museums of the world of course, and it has made a great effort to keep up with modern times, in the face of great difficulties—financial difficulties, lack of space, and so on. But we've had very close relations with director after director at the National Museum and have engaged in a great deal of collaboration, though it's always limited by the formal restrictions under which they operate. The same is true of the Greek numismatic museum; we've had very cordial



relations there also and very close collaboration. And also the Dipylon Museum, which was put together by our German colleagues but was paid for by an old American company—makers of silk stockings. [laughter]

Then there are the other great private museums, notable among which of course is the Benaki. That was started and financed by the Benaki family, a wealthy Greek family who made their fortune in Egypt in the cotton business, early in this century. But like so many Greeks in Egypt, or "beside Egypt"—Alexandria was always referred to as "Alexandria beside Egypt"—they retained very close and meaningful relations with their homeland. One of the early members of the family had a special interest in museology and it was he who turned their old private residence into a museum. His work was continued by a nephew with whom we had very close relations. It's a splendid museum, illustrative of Greek life in the late antique, the Byzantine, and especially the Turkish period; that is, since the fifteenth century. They have been on the whole very forward looking. We had their present director, A. Delivorrias, here as a Visiting Member several years ago. They've always been very cordial. They are right now engaged in a big program of enlargement and modernization.

You mentioned the Goulandris Collection. This was funded by one of the great Greek ship owners, of the Goulandris family. They came from one of the islands but their headquarters was in Athens and they had a splendid house in Athens.



One of the ladies of the Goulandris family took a great interest in the Aegean marble statuettes that were being found thirty, forty, fifty years ago and are still turning up occasionally, and these are of course the earliest real art form in Greek lands, dating to the second millennium B.C. She assembled a large collection of these, which at first were just kept in the home. Eventually she had enough of this and related material together to warrant putting in shape something that could be thought of as a public institution. She opened the museum, twenty years ago perhaps, and has recently enlarged it. They've acquired another house and connected them by a passageway that reminds one of the Morgan Library in New York. She is a very sophisticated woman, very well educated, much traveled, and she's well aware of the needs of a modern museum. The display is not only beautiful but it's arranged for the many visitors who now visit it, notably for school groups. I've seen them at work giving talks to school groups in the basement rooms that are specially fitted for this purpose.

Some indication of the breadth of their interests is this: when the great fuss blew up about the kouros out at the Getty Museum, which had been going on for years, a lot of the students of early Greek sculpture, and European students too, complained that they could not afford a journey to the west coast of America to see the statue, and so were not in a really strong position to judge its age. So the Getty Museum flew over the kouros to be exhibited in the Goulandris Museum, where a



very helpful symposium was held with scholars of various nationalities contributing—among them leading specialists in the field. That was done with very close collaboration, and it was a notable achievement. I think it has greatly enhanced in Greece the respect due to the Getty Museum.

LYONS: Were you there at the conference?

THOMPSON: No, I didn't get over, but I've talked about it with several of the participants.

Another large and once private collection of Greek antiquities is to be visited in a large old house on the north side of the Acropolis, a few minutes walk above the Agora excavations. The collection was made by the Empedokles family, which had been long engaged in industry in Eleusis. They became very much interested in classical antiquities and built up this very large private collection, but they offended the people and the government by the fact that they were so largely responsible for the pollution of the air of ancient Eleusis. The family let it be known that if all went well they would leave their large collection to the state, but then if the government began to enforce regulations about pollution they would withdraw this commitment and would let it be known that they no longer thought of giving it to the state. Eventually they were satisfied that the regulations would be relaxed in their favor, so the collection became a public museum. The family still takes a lot of interest in it, and we know it especially for its splendid collection of terra-cotta figurines, one of the





largest in Greece. That's a very interesting subject in itself, the variety of museums in modern Athens and their history. It well deserves a book.

SMITH: Were you called on to be a consultant for any of these collections from time to time?

THOMPSON: Oh occasionally, yes.

SMITH: What kinds of questions would they ask?

THOMPSON: Well, each of these museums has had good friends in the Greek learned world, so there hasn't been much consultation of that sort. But this most recent incident shows their readiness to get together with other non-Greek specialists.

LYONS: Having been responsible though for the creation of a museum which is contextualized and which shows the results of excavation, how do you react to museums such as the Goulandris Collection, which is based on decontextualized objects—do you find a conflict there?

THOMPSON: You just have to face reality in that case, because we shall never know the circumstances under which most of these Aegean figures were found, or are being found, because the activity still goes on. You might just as well face reality in that area as well as in the numismatic field.

SMITH: But in that situation, if you don't have documentation, how do you determine authenticity?

THOMPSON: It's difficult, but all sorts of modern tests can be applied now—



thermo-luminescence and so on. And Mrs. Goulandris says that she can tell the difference between an ancient and a modern figure.

SMITH: This is something one hears from a lot of people—that you either have the eye or you don't have the eye. Do you have the eye?

THOMPSON: Well, partly. In the case of the Getty kouros, I'm inclined to think that it's a modern work. I was put off by the marble. I accept the opinion of Norman Herz that the marble is marble of Thasos. That's a bit disturbing, of course, as you know very well, in the archaic period. We have it in the Roman period, we have several sculptures from the Roman period in our own collection in Athens, certainly from Thasos. But it would be hard to match the use of Thasian marble for such a monumental piece in the archaic period.

Secondly, and still more important, it's far from being a first-rate piece of marble. There are blemishes in color, and blemishes in the texture of the marble, and some of those had obviously to be eliminated by the sculptor by gouging deep below the proper surface. And in that I found, in my opinion, one of the most decisive arguments against its antiquity. While working on the Stoa of Attalos, I came to be aware that a Greek marble worker, when it comes to fine detail, insists on having perfect marble. The capitals of the Stoa of Attalos required a good deal of delicate carving, and our marble workers—we had some seventy-five on the job at once—insisted on first-rate marble. If it wasn't first-rate they rejected it. Any ancient



Greek sculptor, I'm sure, being entrusted with a commission of this importance, a great monumental figure, tremendously costly, would have rejected that block of marble. I can find an easy explanation for the use of Thasian marble rather than island marble or Pentelic marble: the extraction and export of a huge block of marble of that sort on Thasos would have drawn less attention in modern times than a block of marble being removed from one of the small Greek islands—Paros or Naxos or from any Athenian harbor.

LYONS: As I remember the Aliki quarries are rather isolated, aren't they?

THOMPSON: Yes, they are, so that would have been the easiest possible place for export, for the on-loading of a block of marble of that size. That was a very large block of marble to begin with, and in most places in Greece it would have attracted local attention, which would have surfaced in the inquiry. So it was done obviously by a very skillful sculptor who had studied archaic sculpture very well. He may have mixed schools and periods slightly, but he had certainly done a lot of homework.

I am impressed also by Evelyn Harrison's reaction to the kouros. She knows the technical aspects of Greek sculpture very, very well, and she was disturbed by the apparent use of the saw in certain places, in the crotch for instance, where you wouldn't expect it in archaic sculpture. I find these purely practical factors most decisive, because style is so subjective. I don't know what you're going to do with it eventually. How is it labeled now? Is it on exhibition?





LYONS: It's on exhibition in a whole didactic display of educational materials related to the kouros: studies, conservation, geology, the conference in Athens—the whole debate, so that the public is engaged in the dialogue and tries to decide for itself. It's exhibited along with casts of other kouroi, so it's beautifully displayed as a problem.

THOMPSON: Oh, good. Well, that's a major contribution to this matter. Yes, I'm glad to see that individual museums, and still more, the great museums in Berlin are doing something of the same. We got a book the other day from Von Zabern, the great publishers in our field, on an exhibition of terra-cotta figurines held in the chief Berlin museum. It's a very detailed catalog, with a series of essays, and among the good things about it is the inclusion of quite a large number of figurines of the Hellenistic period which they freely admit are modern forgeries. They are so labeled in the catalog and they're so labeled under the magnificent photos. This is a most valuable addition to our knowledge and expertise in this field—to have these good examples of the modern forgery in that field of art. I'm delighted to hear that the Getty too has gone all out.

SMITH: There's another question concerning presentation that is particularly pertinent to a contextualized museum. You have material that covers fifteen hundred years at least, and yet I think given the history of our interest in things Greek there's always a tendency to focus on the fifth, fourth, and third centuries, and forget that people lived there before and certainly were active for many centuries thereafter.



How did you go about addressing that question?

THOMPSON: Well, we adopted an almost childishly simple scheme of presentation. We decided to have it historical, in this long, long gallery comprising ten of the original shops. You start at one end with the prehistoric, the Stone Age, and Neolithic, which includes a lovely little reclining figure from well back in the third millennium B.C., and a certain amount of choice pottery of that period. Then you work down slowly through the Iron Age, a period that was excavated right under the Stoa, where we found the actual contents of a tomb dating from the eighth century B.C.

One of our most interesting displays from the Iron Age was another tomb group excavated years ago and studied and published in a brilliant article by my late colleague, Evelyn Smithson. It was the grave of a rich Athenian woman of the ninth century B.C. There you have the big pot that held her ashes, the pots that were offered at the funeral, and her jewelry. It contains some of the finest and best preserved jewelry known from the early Iron Age in Greece, and you have it there in a case by itself, illustrating that period.

Then you move on down into the Orientalizing period, the seventh century B.C., with chiefly pottery, including the contents of the little sanctuary excavated by my wife, way back in the early 1930s—that's there in toto. You come down into the sixth century, B.C., and we've displayed there a number of the finest small sculptures



that we have, chiefly heads, into the fifth century B.C. We've shown there also a number of the most "popular" ostraka, with the names of Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and so on. A fragment of one of the great tribute lists of the fifth century B.C. is displayed, and there is also a fair sampling of the equipment from the law courts that were excavated largely beneath the Stoa of Attalos itself.

Then down into the Hellenistic period when the pottery was made largely by molding. We've illustrated the molds that we've found and the little vessels made from them, and a characteristic showing of the Hellenistic terra-cottas. Then we come down into the Roman period and we show statuettes made at that time, but as a result of a classical revival—statuettes made in the Roman period but based on Athenian prototypes of the archaic period. Then on down into the Byzantine period, which is illustrated chiefly by pottery, and the Turkish period, illustrated again by pottery. At the end of the gallery is a characteristic specimen of the context in which many of these things had been found—an ancient well.



SESSION THREE: 9 OCTOBER, 1994

[Tape VI, Side One]

SMITH: I have some questions, which I hope will be simple, concerning the nature of your relationship with the various chairmen of the Managing Committee of the American School. I guess Louis Lord was the first chairman during your tenure, and then there was Charles Morgan, Alfred Raymond Bellinger, and Richard Howland. Did you have much interaction with them?

THOMPSON: Yes, we of the Agora had a good deal to do with them. They of course were very influential figures in the direction of the School, since the Managing Committee contains representatives from all of the 135 universities, colleges, and museums all across this country and Canada. The Managing Committee is made up of delegates from those institutions, and they're all interested not only academically but in a financial way, because they contribute to its regular maintenance. They are expected to set the academic standards for the School, while the board of trustees of course looks after the finances, basically.

We've had very friendly relations with the successive chairmen of the Managing Committee. Louis Lord was a very powerful figure in his day. He was quite a good scholar himself, a great popularizer, and he didn't hesitate to describe himself as someone who could make the results of scholarly work known to the public. He wrote a good deal of a semipopular sort, on historical aspects of classical





civilization. He was a very successful teacher, and he threw his vast energy into the School. He didn't hesitate to express his opinions, and that aroused a fair amount of criticism. Usually it was of a healthy sort, and that led oftentimes to improvements in our policies. Lord was very much interested in the Agora from the very beginning. He had had a lot to do with the Bureau of University Travel, which was one of the most high class and effective travel agencies in those days. They conducted tours in classical lands, especially in Italy and Greece. I and a couple of other young people still engaged in graduate studies were in the service of the Bureau of University Travel in the summer of 1929 on our way to Greece, and that gave us our first insight into the Greek countryside. Have you seen pictures of Lord?

SMITH: Yes, I have seen a picture of him.

THOMPSON: He looked very much like an elderly Roman. I shall never forget a visit that he paid to the Agora excavations in one of the early years. We had just uncovered a very good statue of probably the first or second century A.D., and it was remarkably complete—a very good portrait of a man who had been high up in educational circles in Athens at that time. It just happened that it had come out the morning of the day that he visited the Agora excavations, and when he came in, the technicians were cleaning it for the first time. After they had soaked it a good while in a basin of water they set it up on the edge of the basin, and we all gathered round and looked at it, and Professor Lord was there looking at it. We all immediately were



struck by the likeness between Professor Lord and this ancient marble portrait, and ever since, that bust has been known in the Agora circles as the Louis E. Lord bust.

[laughter]

SMITH: Lucy Shoe Meritt's book talks of Charles Morgan as being one of the three most important chairmen of the American School's Managing Committee.

THOMPSON: Yes, he was that. He was a very different type. He was, one might say, more of a real scholar, a thorough scholar. His principal interest was in Greek sculpture, and he wrote quite a lot on that. He taught extensively at Amherst College all his life, a variety of courses coming right down into the nineteenth century. He did a very nice book on the Hudson River School of painters. He had wide interests. He built up the college museum; it's a very nice teaching collection now at Amherst. He was very much respected in his home community. He too was a man of boundless energy, and really believed in the School.

He had done some important scholarly work at Corinth, especially on their Byzantine pottery, and had produced an excellent book on the subject. They have a far better collection of Byzantine pottery there than we have in the Agora, and he presented it very well. For a long time it remained the standard work on Byzantine pottery in Greece, and it's still valuable. He had excavated himself at Corinth, but then he took an active interest in the Agora as it developed. I think he was very fair minded in his attitude toward the two main excavations of the School, and that was a



difficult role to play because, as you may imagine, local feelings sometimes ran high. He was very even handed in his dealing with the two excavations. He was convinced early on of the practicality of rebuilding the Stoa of Attalos, primarily as a museum and a base of operations for the work there, and he supported it vigorously. Through his energy, and through the support of the other departments in the School also, the archaeological library and the Gennadeion were built up. Yes, he filled the job admirably.

SMITH: There were also several chairs of the committee on the Agora excavation. We have talked about Ward Canaday somewhat, and I suppose he was the most important one, but do you have anything to say about William Tunstall Semple?

THOMPSON: Well, yes, he supported a great deal of archaeological effort in his day, but more through the University of Cincinnati. His favorite excavation was Troy, naturally, and he was a great supporter of the work done at Troy by Carl Blegen, who was then a member of the Cincinnati faculty. It was a bequest that Semple left to the University of Cincinnati that has enabled them to do marvelous work at Troy and on the Palace of Nestor in Pylos. Cincinnati scholars are now resuming Blegen's work in the Argolid (Midea) as also at Troy. The bequest has also supported publications. Yes, he was a successful businessman, but he took a firsthand interest in these archaeological causes that he supported. For years and years, when Blegen was working at Troy, the Semples would go out to visit him, and





they would always stop off in Athens and give us a call at the Agora excavations so that we could keep in touch with each other.

A lectureship was established at Cincinnati, the Semple Lectures, and that has attracted some of the best scholars in our field in our time, including my old colleague, Eugene Vanderpool, who did his principal publication on the ostraka in the Semple Lecture series. That's a very good lecture series and a very good series of publications. Semple was not so immediately interested in the Agora, but he was certainly a very staunch supporter of archaeological causes.

SMITH: I'd like to shift more toward questions concerning the problems of deciding how to reconstruct assignments, some of the questions that require the juxtaposition of your scholarship, your knowledge of the literature, and the practical work you're doing in the field, to get a sense of how you went about tackling the problems that came up. From reading the literature, it seems that the *Strategeion* was likely to be in one place, but you couldn't absolutely determine where. What was the possible evidence that you had, both literary and archaeological, and what was the circumstantial evidence?

THOMPSON: Perhaps we should pull out a plan to illustrate that. You could perhaps bring me the pile of photographs there. [consulting photographs] The area in question is this, the *Strategeion*. It's labeled there without a question mark. There should be a question mark after the name because the identification is not quite



secure, but I still regard it as very probable. The evidence is roughly this: I spoke yesterday of the early cemetery that came to light in here to the southeast of the Tholos. Now, that is pretty well the bulk of the burial place; the majority of the graves are right in that area. As I remarked, they were very well furnished graves and occupied a very prominent place. There was an extremely early road running along here, taking one up to the Acropolis and the southern parts of the city. So this was a family of distinction, and although the burials ceased at the end of the seventh century, the place was never built over by anything substantial in classical times, until very much later. It was obviously kept as a sacred place, and there must have been some good reason for that, because it's a very valuable piece of property. It's at the corner of the Agora, bordering main roads leading in and out of the Agora. There was some good reason for keeping it open.

There was a tiny structure in here—it's not indicated on this schematic plan—that was best interpreted I thought as a very small shrine that would have been the center of any cult that might have been there. Then of later times we found a couple of inscriptions in this general area. The context was not very helpful, but they were found in here, in late Roman context. Mention was made there of a hero, Strategos; one of them was quite clearly a dedication to him. I suggested that he perhaps was the central figure in this shrine. Let me say that we've found and identified a number of small hero sanctuaries around the Agora. There's another one



right there, a triangular enclosure. That was clearly a sanctuary. There's a boundary stone right beside it dating from the late fifth century, still in its original place. You can read it—*tou hierou* (of the sanctuary). There was another little shrine in here that came to be covered over by the great Middle Stoa, and still another one up here at the northwest corner of the Agora. Probably in all cases these hero shrines grew up around the graves of prominent citizens of early times. Their burial places were respected and eventually became the central point of the cult. Most of them died out early, some of them persisted. I suggested then that there was an office called the *Strategeion* that housed the leading officials of the armed forces. Well, that I think was probably the name of the large building, obviously a public building, that was eventually built over this area.

SMITH: Over the cemetery?

THOMPSON: Over the cemetery, yes. Probably in the late fifth or early fourth century B.C. There are many literary references to that, but none of them very explicit, none of them very helpful. But I would suggest that the name may have been derived from the early hero. That is all pretty vague, but the fact is there was an early cemetery here, and there's good reason to believe that worship developed around it, and that the building that came eventually to be placed over it was in a very reasonable place for the head office of the leading officials in the armed forces. Its proximity to the Tholos of course would have been appropriate also. My arguments



have been accepted by some of my colleagues, not by all. It's still an open question, but I would continue to regard it as probable.

SMITH: So your evidence is largely circumstantial rather than positive in this case?

THOMPSON: Yes it is, but it's supported by what we know about other little sanctuaries of this sort.

SMITH: Is there counterevidence that causes problems for your interpretation?

THOMPSON: No, I think not. It will require a whole series of period plans to bring out the evidence. The history of building in this part of the Agora is extremely complex.

SMITH: Near the Tholos?

THOMPSON: Yes, near the Tholos.

SMITH: But there's still a degree of debate about this?

THOMPSON: Oh yes, there probably always will be.

SMITH: Is your interpretation based at all on literary texts?

THOMPSON: Well, partly on literary texts. There are a few inscriptions, but they don't help with the siting of the Strategeion. There's better evidence for the Hipparcheion. That was the headquarters of the cavalry. There's good reason now to believe that it was up near the northwest corner of the Agora. This was the horsey part of the Agora, quite literally so.

SMITH: I know with the Eleusinion there was some question about its siting and





Pausanias's writings became an important part of your argumentation about where it is sited.

THOMPSON: Yes, that has had a happy ending. There's no longer any question about that; no sensible person would dispute the identification of the Eleusinion. There is a manuscript on that sanctuary by one of our young people, Margaret Miles, which should soon be ready for publication as a volume in the Agora series. The evidence there is overwhelming. The number of dedications to Demeter and Kore found in a certain area up on the hill slope just above the Agora fits in with the reference in Pausanias. So that is happily fixed, and it's fortunate because it was of course one of the most revered sanctuaries in Athens.

The Eleusinion festival each year was one of the great festivals in the Athenian calendar, ranking second only I suppose to the Panathenaian. There were tremendous processions along the sacred way, and coming and going between the sanctuary of Demeter here in Athens, and the home sanctuary of Demeter, way out at Eleusis—twelve miles distant. The festival went on for about a week, and it was a great event in the Athenian year. The sanctuary here, and the closely related mother sanctuary out at Eleusis were regarded as the most sacred sanctuaries of the Goddess Demeter in all the Greek world. So it's very satisfactory to have that matter settled so definitely.

SMITH: Another related but somewhat different question concerns the work you put



into reconstructing the gardens. I believe your wife actually was quite instrumental in this project. That raises a question for me, at least from the outside, of how one interprets literary sources describing gardens if you don't have adequate visual evidence of what a garden and what a plant looked like. They may use a word, but how do we know that that word means the same thing that we think it means today?

THOMPSON: Yes, there are some soft areas in the reasoning about the ancient gardens. My wife has done some very important work, not only on the identification of this particular garden, but on the concept of gardening in Greek antiquity. She has done a charming booklet on the subject, particularly in connection with sanctuaries. In the mid-1930s she was in charge of the excavations around the so-called Theseum up here. She soon found that the ground level on which you walk today around the temple is very close to the ground level at which they walked throughout antiquity—on the average not more than a meter above bedrock, which around the temple had been dressed down to that level to correspond with the proper level to go with the temple. This leveling must have been done already in the fifth century B.C.

She thought it well to expose the leveled area of the bedrock around the temple, in case there was evidence of other buildings. As she did that she began to come upon square pits, about a meter square and about a meter deep. They appeared one after another, running in two rows parallel to the flank of the temple. We were all greatly puzzled by this. She worked slowly down in a number of them at once.



They didn't seem to relate to the temple in any architectural sense; that is, they did not align with the columns. That seemed strange. But before long, first in one and then in several, when she got deep down in the filling of the pit, she came on what was obviously a big flower pot, very similar to a modern flowerpot, except that it had a very large hole in its bottom. Then in some cases the roots of the plants were preserved—very slight remains, unfortunately. But there was no question about it; these were planting holes.

Then, as she looked round in the authors, she soon realized that these pots had been used in a familiar method of making cuttings from trees or shrubs. One took a pot with a big hole in its floor, placed it over the branch of a tree or shrub, tied it in place, filled it with earth, and let it stay there until the branch took root within the pot. Then you cut off the branch below the pot and set the pot down in a hole in the ground, shattering it, to permit the roots to expand. She had a perfect illustration of that procedure here. She was able to date it fairly closely from the pots she had found in these pits. It's late Hellenistic, probably second century B.C., the original garden, and it continued in use down into Roman times undoubtedly.

As she pursued the theme, she found evidence for these two rows of planting holes along three sides: the south, the west, and the north side. There's no evidence for planting at the east, that is in front of the temple, and that would be natural, because there undoubtedly had been an altar out here in front, though here the earth





filling above the steeply sloping bedrock is very deep and the altar has completely vanished. But it must have existed here. So, in any case, the front was naturally kept open. But that is the best evidence we have for the temple garden.

We had known from the literary references that there were a good many trees in the Agora. Kimon, for instance, a great politician of the second quarter of the fifth century B.C., had taken special care for planting plane trees in the Agora. They presumably, for the most part, bordered some of the principal thoroughfares through the Agora, and anyone who knows the Greek summer will realize what a welcome addition that was. There's definite evidence for planting around the Altar of Pity in the Agora. That is still a very much debated matter. The Altar of Pity, up here, which is one of the most famous small shrines in the Agora, in the beginning was certainly known as the Altar of the Twelve Gods, but that name seems to drop out in later times, and I have suggested that it came to be called the Altar of Pity. This has not been accepted by everybody, but there is a definite literary reference indicating that there had been planting around the Altar of Pity, and I do think that some of the pits we found there had probably been connected with that planting. But the best literary evidence is that relating to the planting by Kimon—the plane trees. There was undoubtedly a good deal of planting, which came out in various literary references, but the most precise evidence of gardens in connection with the sanctuary is the evidence produced by my wife.



SMITH: As Ralph Griswold was working on the landscaping, was he trying to select plants that would reproduce the look of the classical or Hellenistic Agora?

THOMPSON: Yes, he was a very good landscape man. He was very successful back in Pittsburgh. He was one of the leading landscape people in the city. He had landscaped a number of the fine residences in and around Pittsburgh. He had taken an active part in the landscaping of the golden triangle in Pittsburgh—the junction of the rivers, the site of the old Fort Duquesne. Then he spent two or three years in Rome as a landscape fellow of the American Academy in Rome. Among the practical things that he did there was the landscaping of the American military cemetery at Anzio, which I have not seen but which is said to be very good.

It was on that evidence that we invited him to come and help us on the landscaping of the Agora. I should point out that the landscaping of the area was required of us in the original formal agreement with the Greek government. After the excavation the area was to be landscaped and a permanent museum provided. So we had to take it seriously. Our Greek friends in Athens also took it very seriously, and a committee of the Friends of the Agora Trees was set up, and it included the wives of leading politicians and leading businessmen in Athens. They took an active interest in the whole business of planting the area—concurrently with the work on the Stoa of Attalos. We included the cost of the landscaping in the budget. Our Greek friends were really very actively interested in this.



Griswold was very good in the matter of public relations. Soon after he got to Athens he established a working relationship with the head of the botanical garden. He got to know the head gardener at the royal palace, and all these people were helpful. The royal family contributed a good many plants. The botanical garden contributed plants as well as advice on how to go about planting in Athens. The head of the Athens Water Company, a retired U.S. Army general, Charles Booth, took an active interest in the project, and he loaned his engineers to help us lay out a whole gridwork of water pipes under the whole thirty acres. His company sold us the actual piping at bargain rates. He used to drop in and chat with us about progress on the work, and he asked that a photograph be taken of him standing alongside the Emperor Hadrian, who had built a new aqueduct for Athens. The Athens Water Company was an American installation to begin with, and for long it continued to be American managed. He felt that he had some claim to rank along with Hadrian in this department, and there is this delightful picture of the general alongside the great statue of Hadrian that we had found earlier and set up in the Agora.

This cause was supported by women's clubs here, there and everywhere in the U.S. They made contributions to the planting of certain areas. Mrs. Canaday, the wife of Ward Canaday, was very active in the cause. This was an aspect of the work on the Stoa of Attalos, and the final work in putting the place in shape as a public archaeological park. The part that interested the local Greeks of today most was the



landscaping, because it has given them a very nice park in a very populous part of the city, and it's very much enjoyed by the locals now. Every Sunday morning you find a great many people down there, just enjoying the shade and strolling around. Even the birds have come back to it.

When we set up bronze plaques to record the benefactions that led to the rebuilding of the stoa and the garden, we thought we had given all the expressions of gratitude necessary to the donors and to the participants. Mr. Rockefeller came in for attention as a donor, and on the bronze tablets in the ancient manner we recorded the names of the people who managed the enterprise, but also the names of all the marble workers who had worked on the Stoa of Attalos. Well, members of the committee came in and looked at these bronze tablets and said, "You haven't given enough credit to Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. After all, it was he who was the principal individual who made this whole thing possible. You should do more." Well, we said we didn't want to go too far in that direction. They said, "Leave it to us. We'll do something."

They got a very good profile portrait of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and had a bronze plaque designed in Athens. They had to send it up to Belgium to be cast, but it came out very nicely and it's in the memorial room, the southernmost shop in the Stoa, on the wall. It's the modern Greeks' expression of gratitude toward this great benefactor, who had also done great things for Greece. The Rockefeller Foundation had contributed substantially to the fight against malaria; he was already known for





that, but they were also much moved by what he had done here in the middle of the city.

I should add that we got another great benefaction from the head of the Athens Water Company when he discovered, in looking through the law under which the company operated, that they were required to provide free water for all public gardens in Athens. Ours had already been declared a "national monument," so to speak, a public garden, and so the Agora now gets its water free of charge from the Athens Water Company, and it requires a great deal of water to keep the place green through the summer.

SMITH: You decided to resign your position in 1968. What were your reasons for doing that at that time?

THOMPSON: Well, I thought I had held the job long enough. I had been in office for twenty years, and I was getting on in years. I thought it was time for a change. There was a good young person coming along who had major qualifications for the job: T. Leslie Shear, Jr.

SMITH: How long had he been working on the project with you?

THOMPSON: He had been a member of the staff for only one year, but he was very well known, as you must be aware. He was born in the same year as our youngest daughter. As the son of his parents he had spent much time in Greece. He knew the language well, and he was married to a Greek woman.



SMITH: That was 1938, then, when he was born?

THOMPSON: Yes. He had an excellent record as a student at Princeton University, and he had already been a formal member of the excavation staff at Mycenae, Eleusis, and at Morgantina in Sicily. So he had a good deal of experience, he knew the language, of course, and he knew the history of the Agora excavations. He had done good graduate work at Princeton, especially on some of the early architectural history of the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis. So he seemed very well qualified indeed. I suggested his nomination, the suggestion was formally approved, and he became director.

SMITH: To what degree did you continue an active involvement in the excavation after your resignation as director?

THOMPSON: My continuing responsibility was defined as looking after the publication of everything relating to the Agora that had been found before 1968. That included not only things found in my directorate (1947–1968) but also things found from the very beginning, in 1931.

[Tape VI, Side Two]

THOMPSON: Our regular excavation reports came out in the School's journal, *Hesperia*, founded by Rhys Carpenter back in 1931. Articles that would have overcrowded the journal but did not seem substantial enough for inclusion in the major series of monographs were brought out as supplements to *Hesperia*. This



makes it very easy to follow the course of the excavation year by year by consulting a single journal and its numbered supplements. The series of articles concerning the Agora in *Hesperia* should continue indefinitely.

In 1953 Evelyn B. Harrison's work *Portrait Sculpture* appeared, the first of a series of scholarly volumes on the results of the Agora excavation. The Agora series is patterned on the older Corinthian series. Each volume is devoted to a single type of material: architecture, sculpture, pottery, coins, inscriptions, etc., but they are all numbered in a single series. Most of the authors have been members of the Agora staff and have taken part in some aspect of the excavations.

SMITH: How do your volumes compare, say, with those of Corinth or Samothrace or the Dipylon? Are there distinctive features that you've brought to your series?

THOMPSON: With respect to scholarly quality I believe the Agora series can hold its own. But all those series are high-class, and a scholar counts it an honor to have one or more to his name. As for the book-making, the Agora series may seem more modest than some others, but the Agora, in publishing many volumes that will be regarded as essential to any serious scholar's private library, has striven to keep the price within the financial limits of the scholar. It is gratifying to find that the application of the computer and more business-like procedures is leading to a considerable financial saving.

The most distinctive feature of the publication program of the Agora is the





combination of two series of books. In addition to the scholarly volumes I have mentioned already, we now bring out a series of Picture Books designed for the non-specialist but intelligent reader. The introduction of this series is one of the many good things the Agora owes to Lucy Shoe Meritt when she was general editor of the American School's publications. The booklets are all limited to 32 pages and are paper backed, but the active interest of our printer and engraver of the time assured first-rate quality in text and illustrations. They are written by members of the Agora staff, or others closely associated with the Agora, who have had firsthand experience with what they are writing. The first volume was done by a member of the Agora staff, Lucy Talcott, working with Brian Sparkes, an English scholar from the University of Southampton; it's called *Pots and Pans of Classical Athens*. [laughter] And it is exactly that, an account of the pots and pans, the plain pottery that has been found in the Agora in great abundance that has received precious little attention in times past.

The latest Picture Book is now no. 24. They cover many phases of the results of our excavation. There's one on garden lore, there are a couple on the coinage, there's one on the technical procedure in Greek architecture. There's one on birds in the Agora, and one on civic life which was done by Mabel Lang has been a best-seller. My wife did two or three of them, including one on the Agora as a shopping place. They go on, and for years and years they sold at a dollar apiece. They are



prominently displayed in the Stoa of Attalos in the Agora, and they are available in this country also. They sell by the thousands each year. It's the only branch of the School's publications that makes any money. Not only does it break even, but it yields quite a considerable revenue each year.

SMITH: How do you go about deciding the subject matter, the priority of the topics? Was that informal?

THOMPSON: It's quite informal. As members of the staff and friends of the Agora come up with a good idea, we accept it, and if the person is available and has the competence to do it, we welcome him or her. One has been needed on the private houses for a long time, but that will be done by the young lady who is working on a big volume about domestic architecture. She prefers to put off the Picture Book until she has produced her scholarly volume on the private houses. We should have one on the Temple of Hephaistos and Athena. It's formally not a part of the Agora itself, but it so dominates the scene and is so prominent and so worthy of attention that our visitors are always interested in it, and I think we should produce a Picture Book on it. Alison Frantz did one on the Middle Ages, as illustrated by the excavations in the Agora. That centers closely about the Church of the Holy Apostles—a perfectly lovely little Byzantine church of about 1000 A.D. John Camp has done a couple. One of his best sellers is on the gods and heroes of the Athenian Agora.

The series of Picture Books should go on. We do a printing normally of five



thousand copies, and the popular volumes are reprinted at intervals. We've also tried to keep up a guide book, and we bring out new editions at fairly short intervals. The latest is the fourth edition. It appeared two years ago, and is well illustrated. There's been a certain amount of rivalry of course in the matter of publications, as in so many other ways, between the Agora and Corinth. If I may be allowed a word of criticism of our Corinthian colleagues, it is that they have not paid enough attention to their popular publications. Even their guidebook is inadequate to the site. For a good guide for the Corinth excavations you've got to turn to the Greek productions. A couple of popular volumes have appeared in Corinth, called *Corinth Notes*. They are excellent and more will be welcome. Dr. Charles Williams, who has managed Corinth for so many years, also makes an heroic effort to make the results of the School's work at Corinth widely known by engaging in many lecture tours and taking part in many conferences in America and Europe.

SMITH: I noticed from looking at the titles of what has been published about the Agora, that there seems to be a change in topics from the late 1960s from object orientation to beginning to include more social and cultural and political interpretation. Perhaps I'm just reading something into it that is not accurate.

THOMPSON: No, I think you're quite right. For years, we have been gathering material evidence, and getting it cataloged and organized so that it would be usable. I insisted, right off in the beginning, on publishing a good corpus of the ancient literary



evidence, comprising relevant passages from the ancient authors and inscriptions. That is now readily accessible for anyone interested in what went on in the Agora and what the Agora meant. That was a big job, collecting those hundreds and hundreds of testimonia. For the writing of this basic volume we were fortunate in having the services of R. E. Wycherley, an English scholar I mentioned earlier, who was already familiar with Athens through both the monuments and the ancient authors. The Institute for Advanced Study helped substantially by electing Wycherley a couple of times to a Visiting Membership.

It wasn't safe to go too far in speculating about the significance of the Agora socially and culturally until we had a good big body of evidence both archaeological and literary on which to base our speculations and ruminations. But the change in emphasis did come about, and you're quite right in detecting the shift from collecting to interpreting.

One rather striking example of this that occurs to me right off is Mabel Lang's *Picture Book on Socrates in the Agora*. It's a beautiful piece of work, and well researched, but it also makes the whole story readily available to any intelligent person. It shows Socrates in his setting in the Agora, the kind of people he met with and talked with, and the reaction to his teaching and his way of life. Much of it of course is based on a close knowledge of the literary evidence, but we have added a good deal to the story, and we can trace his beginnings now, I think, with fair





assurance.

In our area he was said to have been the son of a marble worker, and we have found the principal marble working area in ancient Athens just outside the Agora to the southwest. The street was named after the marble workers, and we found the house that had been owned by a marble worker whose name we know from finding it scribbled on some of his pottery—Nikias. It dates from the time of Socrates, late fifth century or early fourth. The house, fortunately, is fairly well preserved and its use as a residence and a marble working establishment is quite clear from the excavation. It gives you a picture of the place where Socrates' father lived and worked, and there's a good literary reference to his having been a sculptor himself in his youth. I think the most likely explanation is that he was an assistant to his father at the time. So here we have the setting for his youth.

My wife Dorothy contributed something valuable to this picture in finding and recognizing the house of Simon, a shoemaker and a friend of Socrates, at the southwest corner of the Agora. There's no doubt about the identification. It's a little house with a courtyard, and there's a well in the courtyard. It's an ordinary Athenian house, but as we now know, workshops were ordinarily combined with residences, and in the courtyard, at the level of the late fifth century Dorothy began to find quantities of hobnails—far more than would be needed in an ordinary house. It was clearly a shoemaker's shop. And then at the appropriate level, late fifth century, she



picked up the bases of a couple of plain black-glazed drinking cups, and the name of the owner had been incised on the bottom. She immediately recognized the name as that of one of the favorite companions of Socrates, [so this was a place] where he used to drop in and talk—incessantly, I'm sure. The shoemaker became very much interested in philosophy himself and is said to have produced some thirty Socratic dialogues based on his conversations with Socrates.

Nothing could be more illuminating than this about the basic facts of Socrates' way of life. It was very down to earth. He had direct contact with all sorts of people. He certainly did, for instance, drop into the shops not only of shoemakers but also of metal workers, and sculptors using both marble and bronze. The names of these and of others come up in the Platonic dialogues. We know that Socrates did a fair amount of "teaching" in the stoas, and one of his favorite places was the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios; that is the setting for three and possibly four of Plato's dialogues. We now have the law courts securely identified, up at the northeast corner of the Agora, and I think there's good reason, as I said the other day, to identify the great square building at the southwest corner of the Agora as originally a hero's shrine, which in later times was used in connection with the lawcourts, conceivably at the time when Socrates was tried. And we have good reason to identify one of our buildings as the prison where he spent his last month. It took some years to accumulate this evidence, but Mabel Lang stepped in with her Picture Book and put it all together at a time



when the evidence was secure, both on the literary side, and now on the archaeological side.

Another area of the Agora which hasn't received as much attention as it deserves is the setting in which the Athenian potters of the black-figure and red-figure periods lived and worked. I wrote an article about it some time ago ("Two Centuries of Hellenistic Pottery." *Hesperia* III(1934): 311–480.) This whole quarter of the city in which the Agora developed was known as the Kerameikos, the potter's quarter of Athens. The earliest pottery kiln known in Athens came out from deep under the level of the Tholos—eighth century B.C. Most of the actual business of making pottery shifted to an area on the borders of the town, out by the Dipylon. But potters certainly did live and work on the hill slope on which the temple stands, right along the west border of the Agora.

We found remains of their little workshops up there, and the dumps of waste from their shops. Much of the finest Athenian pottery in the sixth and fifth century B.C. was produced by people living and working in little shops here on the very borders of the Agora. I think that explains much about their choice of subject matter. Just an example or two: they paid a great deal of attention to what was going on in other shops around them. We have delightful scenes, in black-figure pottery especially, but also in red, of shoemakers at work in their shops. They're so circumstantial that they must have been based on autopsy. There's no doubt about





that. Our best evidence for the procedure in the making of bronze statues comes from red-figure pottery. Delightfully circumstantial, but beautifully composed scenes in the workshops of leading sculptors of the time, because the sculptors also lived and worked right around here. They also were very good in the treatment of horses, and the horses are very prominent.

You might wonder how potters living and working in the middle of this big city could have known about horses, which were certainly not commonly used here—they must seldom have appeared in actual use in town. There must have been plenty of donkeys, but horses were something exceptional. Greece, Attica especially, is a land of donkeys and goats, not horses and cows, but you find in the Athenian pottery, both black figure and red figure, magnificent horses represented very knowingly. Well, the explanation there I think is again very simple now that we know the context: this was, as I said, the horsey part of town. The headquarters of the cavalry were up here somewhere [pointing to map], because in a well here, we found a whole mass of the little lead tablets that represented the registration of horses. The Panathenaic procession, going up to the Acropolis, in which horses of course were very prominent, assembled up here at the northwest corner of the Agora. According to Xenophon, and even from inscriptions, we know that even down into the Hellenistic period and probably into the Roman period there were splendid equestrian displays here in the Agora—the best horsemanship of the day.



All this went on in clear view of the painters. Then as the great stoas were built, the Painted Stoa especially, but also the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios, their walls were adorned by the leading artists of the time; these were the greatest paintings being made in Athens. These painters were in clear view of the potters, who watched them going about their business. Of course many scholars have pointed to the impact of these major paintings on potters. We now see how it happened. It's a long story, and there's much more to say about it, but that I think is in many ways quite an important contribution of the Agora excavation, giving us the context in which the Athenian potters lived and worked.

SMITH: What about the standards for photography for the site and the artifacts. Did you give any thought as to what would constitute good photographic presentation and documentation? Actually presentation and documentation are sometimes conflicting things.

THOMPSON: We haven't done as much of it as we should have, but the still photography I think was well handled. We've had first-rate photographers. First the German, Hermann Wagner, and then Alison Frantz, with a worldwide reputation for her services to archaeology and art history. After Frantz's retirement we've had some very good people. Let me also say that we have not neglected aerial photography. We made contact with J. Wilson Myers and Eleanor Emlen Myers early on, and they have photographed the area from their balloon, at intervals. They are now at Boston



University, but we keep in touch, and they are I think doing the best job of any outfit in aerial photography nowadays. I think their results are magnificent. They have covered our area thoroughly and repeatedly, so we have a pretty good record of it from the air. But we have neglected the movie side.

We should have done far more with movies and TV programs. A short film was made many years ago while I was still in charge; it was done under the auspices of the BBC, and they were very cooperative. They were doing a series of eight programs on ancient Athens, and they regarded the Agora as worthy of one of these programs. But I regret that more use was not made during my directorship of a medium that is now recognized as so valuable for educational use as well as for publicity and public relations.

LYONS: What other sorts of analytic techniques are used to study some of the more hard-to-observe aspects of the Agora? For example, you mentioned that Larry Angel had looked at some of the bone material, but has there been flotation or analysis of seed, or other kinds of organic material?

THOMPSON: Yes, very much has been done on that side, especially on the study of marbles, by Norman Herz, who started his career with us assisting in the putting together of the Attic stelai, the record of the goods of Alkibiades and the others who were implicated in the desecration of the Eleusinian mysteries. That was his first real fieldwork in the recognition and the analysis of marbles. He kept at it of course for



the rest of his life, and, as I remember, his opinion about the marble of your kouros is accepted by everyone, and that is very valuable evidence, because it's scientific and less subjective than most.

We've also done a good deal on the analysis of the metal that was used in coinage; that is being worked on still, because we have found a building that was used as the mint of Athens in the late Hellenistic and Roman period, at the extreme southeast corner of the Agora, near and partly under the Church of the Holy Apostles. It was partly excavated years ago and then John Camp stepped in and completed the excavation. He has found indubitable evidence for the recognition of this as the mint of Athens in the late Hellenistic and early Roman period. And there we had a chemist on our staff, who worked in a commercial way with American companies that dealt with metals. Years ago, he had started a chemical analysis of metals from our finds, and this has been renewed recently. It becomes clear that Athenian coins can be dated with fair precision from the analysis of the metal used in them. As time goes on, the amount of tin used in the amalgam in the making of coins decreases, and the tin is supplanted by the much cheaper metal, lead. On my desk here is an application from one of our old members who wants to work further on this problem. He's very much interested in the possibilities of refining this procedure.

As for the floral material, my predecessor, Leslie Shear, Sr., was very much interested in collaboration with specialists. He was a great collector of seeds, and he





got the help of his colleagues at Princeton University. Every season he would bring back seeds and the remains of vegetation found in the excavation and get them identified. But this was sixty years ago, and things hadn't gone very far yet. His son has continued to take an interest in these scientific aids to classical excavation, with sometimes satisfactory, sometimes unsatisfactory results. He found a splendid altar of the late archaic period—late sixth century B.C.—fairly well preserved. The side walls were intact and the filling was all there. He had the filling very carefully kept, and then used flotation and all on it, and got masses of bones of the offerings.

The first person to work on it, who was said to have been a specialist on faunal remains, pronounced a large proportion of these bones as the bones of birds, especially of doves. This strengthened the excavator's belief and hope that this would prove to be an altar of Aphrodite, one mentioned by Pausanias. But somebody questioned this identification, so we got hold of another, still higher ranking student of faunal remains, who went over all the material again very carefully and came out with what is now accepted as a more reliable analysis of the skeleton material. In fact, there were very few remains of birds. The bones were chiefly of mice and rats, and there were practically no remains of doves. So all that evidence for the identification of the sanctuary was washed out. Our experience has not been entirely happy.

LYONS: Could they really have been sacrificing mice and rats, or did those animals



enter in afterwards?

THOMPSON: They may have entered afterwards, yes. We haven't done a vast amount of this sort of investigation, because we are excavating in the heart of the modern city. Our mission has been to find out as much as we could find out about the civic life of an ancient city, the most distinguished of all the ancient city states: to discover its mechanics, how civic life worked; how artistic life worked—that too was largely centered in the Agora; and to find as much as we could about domestic life, which is a fringe matter. We have of course private houses all around the Agora, but it's not as though we were working out in the country, where animal life and plant life would play a much larger part.

I don't want to seem negligent of this aspect of modern archaeology; we are very well aware of its possibilities, but it plays only a very small part in our whole mission. As I say, we are shocked at times at the results. This is one reason why classical archaeology is regarded as backward and nonenterprising, but you've got to consider the terms of your mission. We had a very well defined mission, and we intend to go on and carry it out.

SMITH: You have alluded several times in the course of the interview to the conflict between traditional and new archaeology, yet you have also indicated I think a strong sympathy for anthropological methods. When we first met, several months ago, you had also indicated that anthropology had been important to you in terms of your own



thinking, so how would you define the distinction between the traditional and the new classical archaeology?

THOMPSON: Well, it has come about in a natural way. After all, there have been a fair number of intelligent people engaged in classical archaeology for a very long time, and they've thought about these problems. The anthropologists claim to have been the innovators in these matters, but anyone who knows even the work of Arthur Evans realizes that he must have had a strong feeling for the anthropological aspects of his findings at the palace of Minos and in Crete in general. And that has been true of classical archaeologists working elsewhere. Some of us may have been backward and have neglected the possibilities of different approaches, but we have developed our own, which have grown out of this particular excavation. We should certainly read what the anthropologists have to say and we do, but at the same time we want to make the most of our own area here, where the available material is pretty clearly defined now—the literary and the archaeological. We're doing our best to collate the two and to see what emerges.

SMITH: You are very much involved in reading manuscripts, refereeing grants, applications, and writing letters of recommendation. One sees references to your critical comments in many books and articles, so you seem to be quite active in terms of the contemporary literature. How much time do you spend on these kinds of activities—reading manuscripts, vetting grant applications, and so forth?





THOMPSON: That's a major call on my time nowadays. I regard it as a sort of duty, but of course it's the duty of any senior member of the academic community to do this sort of thing. I just haven't had the energy to do what many colleagues have done—helping junior scholars and all that with their advancement and their grants. Other colleagues have found time to write their own books too, and I'm afraid I have done a minimum of writing. Whatever talent I have in this area I think has been rather in the way of bringing out the best in others and making it possible for others to be able to do what they can do best.

SMITH: As you do this, do you worry about these larger theoretical questions, or more rhetorical questions of traditional versus new archaeology, or classical versus anthropological? Does that shape the way you look at these manuscripts?

THOMPSON: Oh, to some extent, but not much. I hope the time will soon come when people will not classify archaeologists as "old-fashioned" archaeologists and "new" archaeologists; I hope they will just classify them as "good" archaeologists and "poor" archaeologists.

SMITH: Do you spend a fair amount of time reading things from the so-called "new archaeologists"?

THOMPSON: Not much, no. Tony [Anthony M.] Snodgrass has written more sensibly than most of them, but I don't find a lot of their writing worth reading.

SMITH: Why is that?



THOMPSON: It's so highly speculative. After all, the anthropologists can go too far in speculation. They criticize us for spending so much time in cataloging and massing material without interpreting it. I've seen this process go on in this big excavation. It took us years to amass the information that we need on which to speculate, and it's absurd to criticize the classical archaeologist for gathering material and putting it in good shape and making it usable by everybody. That is my basic complaint with the "new archaeologists."

SMITH: I'd like to review some of the more rhetorical debates that have occurred—things I've picked up in the literature. For instance, prior to World War II, there seemed to be a large number of debates over whether ancient Hellenic society was pure Aryan or a mixed society, with much oriental and African influence. Do you recall those debates at the time?

THOMPSON: Yes, they eventually climaxed in Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*. But any good archaeologist in the time of my youth, fifty or sixty years ago, was well aware of the importance of the development of what we think of as Athenian. The culture of classical Greece, was tremendously influenced by contacts with Egypt and the Near East. The German Archaeological Institute, years and years ago, when it gave one of its major grants, insisted that the recipient spend time in Egypt, in the Near East, in Greece, and in Italy. One of these grants would normally come early in the career of an aspiring archaeologist, and that I think was an excellent practice.



Any intelligent young person who had eyes to observe and a mind to think would have been greatly affected by that and would have realized already in the beginning of his career the evidence for the impact of Egypt and the Near East on the beginnings of Greek art at any rate. For the impact on Greek religion and Greek thinking of course we've got to go chiefly to the authors, above all Herodotus. As I said the other day, I shall never forget my firsthand acquaintance with Egypt, having spent just a week there in 1929. That made a tremendous impression on me and I've never forgotten it.

SMITH: But then if the historical records and the archaeological records seem to be so clear, why were there so many people advocating this idea of Greece as pure Aryan? And why are they also trying to deny that the modern Greeks had any relationship to the ancient Greeks?

THOMPSON: The modern Greeks are a curious mixture, but I think the modern Greek population in very, very large part has a continuous tradition. We know that Greece was conquered by the Romans, and by the Vandals from the north, and later by the Turks, but we also know that in each of these cases the foreign people who settled in Greece were comparatively few. The Albanians were probably the largest foreign group to settle in Greece. In parts of Greece, like many of the Greek islands, the Greek tradition is purer than on the mainland. From my very long acquaintance with the Greek people, I am constantly struck by the way in which they think and behave so much according to the pattern evident in ancient Greek writings, above all,



in the *Odyssey*, and in Herodotus, which are very Greek works, surely, but their behavior in private life and in public life are so basically similar that I think there must be a very strong continuity in tradition. I know that is still disputed, but I think the heat of that debate has subsided somewhat in recent years.

At one time we had three hundred Greek workmen at the Agora excavations. These were all genuine Greeks, with a few Albanians from Eleusis. But they were easily recognizable. I remember one of our foremen was born and brought up in Albania. When the Italians occupied Albania suddenly, the following morning I came down and I found this particular workman looking very cheerful. I said, "But Andreas, how in the world can you be so cheerful, knowing that your old homeland has been taken over by the Italians?" He said, "Oh, Mr. Thompson, at last I have become a real European." [laughter] We've had our Greek servants for years and years, and they behave very much in the way that servants behave in the *Odyssey* and in the plays, in Aristophanes especially. They are clever people in general.

[Tape VII, Side One]

THOMPSON: Year after year, we never had reason to suspect them of stealing anything, and they were always very helpful and supportive and sympathetic and very understanding; they were real students of human nature. In their hospitality toward foreigners they are very much like the ancient Greeks. They are interested in intellectual matters, and it's astonishing oftentimes. You talk with someone out in a





remote village, and you find out how much he knows about international affairs. I remember years ago, in my early years in Greece, I was out for a good long tramp, and I found myself way up on Mount Parnassus, a place where I could look down into Boeotia, the whole vast area of central Greece. A shepherd came along with his flock and his staff and we had a chat. I asked him, "Does the city of Thebes lie over there?" [He said,] "Yes, yes, it does." And I asked, "Is Delphi over in that direction?" He said yes. Then I asked, "Is Tanagra there?" He said yes, and then he became curious. He said, "But you're a stranger. How do you know all this?" I told him I just read about it. He said, "Ah yes, books. Books are the eyes of the world." This was a shepherd on the top of Mount Parnassus. Now, that reminds you very much of what might have happened in Greek antiquity. It's the same mentality—an interest in things, and an interest in foreigners.

SMITH: One of the interests that has motivated at least American work in Greece and in Athens was the idea of Athens as the birthplace of democracy. Was that an idea that was present in the American School when you were there, and was it something that was important to the work?

THOMPSON: Yes, it was there from the beginning. We didn't concentrate as much in the beginning as we do now on the actual birth of democracy—its birth and its early life—but of course we have been finding, one after another, the physical facilities used by successive forms of government in Athens. We have gotten a pretty



adequate picture of the development of the physical facilities as they were in Athens from well back into the sixth century throughout the rest of antiquity. One of the major problems about the history of what we think of as *the* Agora is a single literary reference to an earlier agora. A great deal of stress has been put on that. What was meant by "agora" in this reference was really just a gathering place, a place where speeches would be made—a talking place. And that reference suggests a site way up on the slopes of the Acropolis.

People have done a great deal of thinking about and searching for a possible earlier site for the Agora, starting in the early sixth century—that puts you in the time of Solon—and that would be a fairly reasonable place to have a new agora. To make a very long story short, it's now pretty clear that there was an earlier place that might have been referred to as an agora, though it's nothing like the later one, at the northeast foot of the Acropolis, in a place where it was conveniently accessible to the greater part of the Attic countryside, where the farmers would come in with their goods, and so on. It was also conveniently accessible from the earliest harbor used by the Athenians, that is, Phaleron. A site down there at the northeast corner of the Acropolis was appropriate for an earlier community center. You do hear of an early Prytaneion over there, a base of operations for the Prytaneis, the leading officials in the Athenian state government. A couple of the earliest sanctuaries are known to have been over there—a sanctuary of the hero Theseus, the great Athenian hero, and



the sanctuary of Castor and Pollux, who also had close relations with Athens. That can now be inferred from various literary references and from the discovery of the little Shrine of Aglauros, high up on the slopes of the Acropolis, near the northeast corner. That has been tremendously helpful.

On the basis of all this evidence one can place the earlier agora at the northeast foot of the Acropolis with a fair degree of assurance. But that's all under the modern city and is now inaccessible, except occasionally when an old ruinous house is pulled down and the Greeks move in and do some digging. We have no real conception of the scheme of it. It was probably a very informal agora as compared with the later one—informal and rather haphazard in its disposition. There's now good reason to believe that our place began to be opened up as a new civic center.

I should remind you that in earlier times, in Mycenaean times, our area was used as a cemetery. There are Mycenaean graves all over here, and that practice continued down through Protogeometric and Geometric times; that's through the eighth and down into the seventh century, when graves ceased to be made here as a normal thing. Private houses begin to be pulled down and private wells begin to be abandoned in this general area fairly early in the sixth century B.C., and it then developed slowly as an important public center—for various reasons I think. An area here [pointing on map] was more readily accessible from the new harbor of Piraeus. It was more accessible to Eleusis because of the relationship of the two sanctuaries at





Eleusis and here. If you are going to Eleusis you start out from about here [pointing on map], the Sacred Way. Then came the Panathenaic games festival, reorganized on a much more splendid scale than had previously been the case, in the year 566 B.C., under Peisistratus. That is symptomatic, I think, because one of the principal events in the Panathenaic national festival was the great procession, the *pompe*, that from the beginning led through this area, going up to the Acropolis. Well, that required space. These festivals were enormous affairs; they brought in so many thousands of people from the countryside. They needed space for the actual activities—not only for the procession but also for the athletic events, which originally took place here. We have clear evidence of a race course right in the middle of the Agora from very early times. Commerce was developing, and shopkeepers needed more adequate space.

So all these factors worked together toward the opening up of a new public center for civic life. The seal is put on that development by the construction of the Altar of the Twelve Gods, here, by the younger Peisistratus, the grandson of the old man. We are told by an inscription on another altar that he set up this sanctuary as a memorial to his archonship and his archonship is known to have been 522-521 B.C. That soon became the measuring point for distances from Athens to all the towns in Attica round about. So it was in essence the "golden milestone" of Athens, and continued to be. Well, that was a clear indication that by that time this was regarded as the formal center of Athens. Probably as early as the time of Kleisthenes, who is



the reputed father of Athenian democracy, some of the accommodations for the leading organs in Athenian government had been moved over here. The clearest indication so far is under the Tholos, where they came on the remains of an early very modest structure that I think may have accommodated the Prytaneis or their antecedents in earliest times.

Up here [pointing on map] we have the Royal Stoa, which in its earliest phase probably dates from the late sixth century and was the seat of the Royal Archon. The Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios will have accommodated the other eight archons, so that you have one important branch of Athenian government here, and another branch here, and probably at the same time the Pnyx came into use as the meeting place for the sovereign body, the Ekklesia, within a five-minute walk of the Agora. Previously, their deliberations had taken place over here in the old Agora, or right in front of the Propylaea. So it was a long gradual development that took place in the sixth century B.C. But eventually we had pretty well the whole setup. One of the important buildings that is still lacking is the office of the cavalry officers. There's abundant evidence for putting it somewhere up around here [indicates spot on map], but we haven't been able to put our fingers on it yet, and it may not fall within the limits of our excavation. The north side, with the Stoa of the Poikile, has been developed since my retirement—one of the great things done by my successor.

SMITH: One of the general conclusions that most historians in the United States



accept is that prior to 1945 there was a general concern about reaffirming classical values, the overt principles upon which academic work and American life proceeds, but after '45 there was a shift away from interest in values per se and their sources to more concrete facts. How would that story apply to archaeology, or would it?

THOMPSON: I think that change did occur. I expect it was due in large part to the activity of the archaeologists, with excavations in various Greek cities—not only our own excavations, but Corinth, and the work of the Germans in the great old Greek cities of Asia Minor. They were attracting much more attention and becoming a great secondary source of information about Greek antiquity. So I think it was a natural change.

SMITH: Did you do any reading of the work of Karl Popper?

THOMPSON: No, no.

SMITH: Did you follow any of the debates that happened when Thomas Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was published?

THOMPSON: No.

SMITH: So you stayed rather apart from general epistemological questions?

THOMPSON: Yes, I found myself fully occupied with this enterprise.

LYONS: Just to come back for a moment to the time when you ceased to be the excavation director and Leslie Shear took over, did Leslie Shear have a different methodological field approach to yours, or do you believe he has carried on the



tradition and simply expanded the geographical territory that was under investigation?

THOMPSON: Yes, the latter was true. He had great respect for his father of course, and he knew his father's methods and approach to archaeological excavation. Before he took over the directorship he had served for one year as a member of the team and had done an excellent job on the monument of the Eponymous Heroes—it's a very fine article on a very important old monument in the Agora. He has continued along much the same lines. He has, I think quite rightly, insisted on closer recording of context pottery and all that, and the very intensive study of pottery in relation to buildings, which has again led to an improvement in our chronology of individual monuments in the overall picture. He has carried on very much the old tradition. He did make some effort to introduce more modern methods, like water screening and so on, but he got a disturbing shock in the matter of the bones of the doves.

LYONS: What about John Camp? Have you spoken with him? What do you suppose his priorities will be?

THOMPSON: I'm afraid that he too is tarred with the same brushes. I followed his career pretty well from the beginning. I remember when I got a letter from him at the time when he was still just a third-year student at Harvard. He had been reading classics and had developed an interest in archaeology, and he wrote to ask whether there was anything he could do for us in Athens in the Agora excavations. This came as a surprise because previously we had taken on only students who already had their





first degrees, were engaged in graduate studies, and were clearly headed for an archaeological career. So this letter did come as a surprise, but it was so clear and sensible that I accepted his offer of help at once and said, "Do come over. We'll find something for you to do." He supervised an area of excavation that first year, and it became obvious to all of us that he was a born excavator, and he's been associated with the Agora ever since.

John Camp is one of Eugene Vanderpool's leading disciples. Fortunately the influence has been excellent. He has pretty much the same attitude toward antiquity, toward what one may expect from archaeology and how one should pay attention to such matters as flora and fauna as well, and he has done very good work on individual areas. He undertook to do the volume that we must have in our official publication eventually on the handling of water in the Agora, the water supply and the drainage system. He did something along these lines in his doctoral dissertation, which has not been published, but I have a manuscript of it in there. I'm sure he'll get around to that eventually, although he has taken on as the subject of an Agora volume the early buildings on the south side of the Agora, and he's already done a lot of work on those. They included of course the two early fountain houses at the southeast and southwest corners.

He has now a very good overall knowledge of the Agora, its history and the stories of the individual monuments and buildings and so on, and I was so glad that he



undertook to do a general book on the Agora, which I think is just what was needed. Wycherley and I had done a general book, but it was more for the student, whereas by categories of buildings he has done it in an historical sequence and made things intelligible to any intelligent reader, and that was just what was needed at the time. I'm sure he'll make a good head of the enterprise. His appointment as director came about in a rather sorry way. I don't know how much you have heard of the story.

LYONS: How did it come about? It's recent isn't it, in the last year?

THOMPSON: Well, not this past summer, but the previous summer. There was a great ruction in the excavation. You know that for years now this was one of the great changes in policy introduced by the new director, Leslie Shear, Jr. Most of the manual work in the excavation is now done by the student volunteers. About thirty are invited to participate in the Agora excavations each summer. They've got to show some special aptitude or special preparation for this, and oftentimes they return for a second year, even a third year, so that they become quite a skilled and competent lot of young people. I think this is splendid. Not only is it a great relief to the budget, but it gives a substantial number of young people an opportunity for firsthand acquaintance with classical antiquity. It worked out very well until the summer before last, when the whole Shear family was engaged in the excavation.

Mrs. Shear, who is a trained archaeologist, and her daughter Julia, who has done a lot in archaeology, were directing sections of excavation. Well, it turned out



that in the section under the oversight of Julia Shear there was a black woman, a graduate student here at Princeton University, and some altercation occurred between Julia Shear and this black girl. Julia Shear is said to have shouted at her something that was very unacceptable to a black person, and a ruckus developed within that part of the excavation. Mrs. Shear, the mother, was called in, Leslie Shear was called in, and they had some difficulty in stopping it.

A number of those of the gang working in that area got together and submitted a letter to the director of the excavations and of the School, pointing out how this had happened and how characteristic it was, this ethnic stress, in the little group. Word of it got back to Princeton University, and, well, to make a long story short, it led eventually to a decision on the part of the School that in the future, no more than one member of a family should be actively engaged in its excavations. No mention of names. Well, Leslie Shear refused to accept this ruling. He said he would resign instead of accepting this. His resignation was submitted formally and accepted formally. I must say at that stage it was accepted very gladly.

This is really a sad aspect of Leslie Shear, Jr.'s directorship. He's a curious man. He's married to the daughter of a very distinguished Greek scholar, George [E.] Mylonas, who was very successful as a teacher here in this country. He was for three years president of the Archaeological Institute of America, and then he returned to Greece and achieved high honors and office there. And yet Leslie Shear has a





curiously low opinion of Greeks in general; he still refers to them as "they." More than once the Greek authorities have spoken to me frankly and said they found it almost impossible to deal with Leslie Shear in matters concerning the Agora. They have found it more profitable to go to John Camp—for years this has been going on.

I was confirmed in my thinking about this aspect of the matter by the attitude of two distinguished young Greek scholars whom we had with us as visiting members of the Institute last year. They heard about it at once—I don't know just how—but they came in and spoke with me about it, and spoke with evident delight, as a great change for the better. They were thinking of it in terms of the relationship between the Greeks and Americans. I have spoken with several people who were active in this past season's summer campaign in the Agora, I asked them how things went. They said it was a great change, a very jolly summer. No names were mentioned, but it was quite clear what the cause of this was.

This was stupid behavior on the part of the Shears, because there are several black people on the staff in Princeton University now, including one person in the English department who is a very prominent author herself and who was the recipient of a Nobel Prize two years ago, Toni Morrison. Now one can imagine how she felt about this when the news came through. It's been very embarrassing for the University.

SMITH: As for family involvement, I know that the University of California system,



the Getty, and the University of Michigan for a long time have had rules in place that no matter how talented a family member is, you can't have them be in the same situation where somebody else is directing; that seems to be normal professional practice, so it would seem that in that sense the School was just catching up with what the rest of American academia views to be normal, and it's curious to me that it would take this long, that we're talking probably thirty or forty years after.

THOMPSON: Yes, I have to be cautious in what I say or think about this matter—

SMITH: Well, you may think it's wrong yourself, I mean the change in policy.

THOMPSON: No, no, it's a very difficult relationship.

SMITH: Certainly your wife worked in the Agora project while you were directing it.

THOMPSON: Yes, and she was a very active and productive member of the team. She has no ethnic feeling whatever; she was brought up in a good Philadelphia home where black servants were the norm. She grew up with a black nurse and had a great respect and admiration for the blacks and their good qualities. So she's color-blind, really, and always has been.

This incident was very deplorable, but it results very largely from the individual personality of the young girl, Julia. You know, she went to Harvard for her undergraduate studies. In her senior year, she got into an altercation with a classmate and, to put it very simply, she threw her classmate downstairs. She was expelled from



Harvard and not allowed to return to complete her degree work until her classmate had graduated, so that they would not both be there together. She did go back and got her degree from Harvard, but then had to apply for graduate study. She applied naturally to Princeton and was turned down. She finally was accepted by Penn.

LYONS: Was it a question more of nepotism and the fact that her father is prominent in the department?

THOMPSON: No, it was in view of her own record and what was known about her personality by this time. I must say that the people at Penn have been surprised and shocked by her behavior.

SMITH: Penn has had its own fair share of problems recently over these same issues.

THOMPSON: Yes, yes. She's quite an able girl, but not nearly as able as she thinks she is. It's a very sorry story, and has been a very painful one for the authorities of the American School who were responsible for handling it.

SMITH: In terms of shifting to student manual labor, there are probably a number of factors, but I wonder is it the rising cost of Greek laborers, the increasing numbers of American students available, and to what degree was it Shear's apparent anti-Greek or perhaps anti-Greek-working-class attitude—lower class Greeks?

THOMPSON: I don't know. I wasn't in on the planning for this change in the employment of student volunteers. Whether it was Leslie Shear's original idea or John Camp's, I wouldn't be sure. It may just as well have been John Camp who



suggested it. But it was already being followed, this practice, elsewhere, in other excavations. We were not pioneers in this.

SMITH: But wouldn't the Greek government find this somewhat of a problem, since these excavations did provide employment for people?

THOMPSON: It was done at a time when there was a shortage of labor in Greece, so there was surprisingly little opposition on that score. The point was raised, this aspect of it, and as far as I can make out, the people running the Agora at that time had no great difficulty in meeting these objections on the labor side. It does seem to have worked very well. The cost of labor in Greece of course is now very high. Thank goodness we got so much of the heavy excavation done at a time when the exchange rate between Greece and the U.S. was very favorable to the U.S. For most of the time, up until World War II, we paid our workmen the equivalent of the ordinary pick-and-shovel man, 75¢ or \$1 a day. Even the men working on the reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos, the marble workers and the stone cutters, received only between \$5 and \$10, whereas now the wages in Greece are up to \$30 or \$40 a day for ordinary workmen. So it makes an enormous difference on the financial side. But I think the great importance of it is in giving a larger number of young people an opportunity to share in this work.

SMITH: But then your labor shifts from people who are trained to know what they are doing in terms of manual labor to people who may never have done manual labor





before in their life and are not likely to continue doing it, so the work may not be done quite as well.

THOMPSON: Yes, that is a fact.

SMITH: You seem to have a reasonably high regard for the Greek laborers who worked on the project.

THOMPSON: As I look back on it that was one of the pleasanter aspects of my long years in the excavation of the Athenian Agora, yes, coming to know the Greek workmen. They are an interesting lot of people. Many of them took a real interest in what they were doing and shared in our triumphs and our disappointments and were glad to come back year after year as they did. We couldn't provide them with year-round employment; it was a comparatively short season, two or three months at the most. The same was true of the work on the Stoa of Attalos. It was also a very interesting revelation to me to see how Greek buildings were put together, and in what spirit, and under what working conditions, and what sort of skill was required. That was a very select lot of workmen, the seventy-five men who were doing the actual work on the stone and marble of the Stoa. The foreman of our marble workers had been in the employ of the School much earlier, in the construction of the Gennadeion Library in the 1920s.

SMITH: Do you remember his name?

THOMPSON: No, it's gone from me, like almost all other names. I can find it for



you eventually. But he was a very interesting character. He had a shop out near the First Cemetery, where his principal product was tombstones. He had long supervised fine marble work, and our chief difficulty with him was that he wanted to produce something finer than the original work in the Stoa of Attalos, which was rather coarse. I found myself in the strange position of having to say, "Let this be coarser." [laughter] I came to realize how much of the beauty and the perfection of Greek architecture depends on the personality of the people who did the manual work: the sureness of their eyes, and the way the hand and eye work together with an absolute minimum of equipment.

Before marble work began on the Stoa of Attalos, I visited the headquarters of the Vermont Marble Company and discussed various matters with them. They showed me all their modern equipment invented in this country and in Europe, and they were thoroughly up to date. I inquired as to how much of this modern equipment we should acquire for our job and they asked, "What will you pay your men?" I said we would be paying the top people the equivalent of \$10 a day. They said, "Forget modern machinery and equipment and follow the ancient methods." This we did in large part.

SMITH: Which worked out adequately, then?

THOMPSON: Yes, yes. Professor Lothar Haselberger, the first holder of the chair in ancient architecture recently established at the University of Pennsylvania, had been



a member of the German team working on the famous old temple of Apollo at Didyma, in Asia Minor. There he had acquired fame as the first to recognize on a still unpolished wall of the temple the lightly incised drawings of the columns to guide the marble workers in their carving. I was able to report that in our restoration of the columns of the Stoa of Attalos the architect had drawn the columns with great care on the back wall of the shed, where the marble workers could easily consult them.

SMITH: The archaeology profession has had its fair share of conflicts over changing professional standards. It seemed from reading the literature that a lot of people are unhappy about the changes in the constitution of the Managing Committee of the American School, and I wondered to what degree that is because archaeology, unlike many other disciplines, still involves the interaction of academics and amateurs. I don't use the term "amateur" in a derogatory sense, but just to represent someone from the general public who has had a special love of things and has therefore developed a special knowledge.

THOMPSON: I haven't been very active in the affairs of the Managing Committee, of which I am a member emeritus, as also of the board of trustees, but I attend the regular meetings of both bodies when health permits. The interaction of academics and amateurs is indeed a serious matter, but it relates more directly to the board of trustees rather than to the Managing Committee. As you are aware, the Managing Committee is made up of representatives of all the institutions that support the School





by regular subscriptions, and so its membership is overwhelmingly academic and its primary responsibility is the academic well-being of the School. The board, on the other hand, is responsible for and has the final word in financial matters. It comprises a number of academic ex officio and often emeriti, but it is here that the "amateurs" make their most direct impact on the School as a whole.

I was glad to hear you say that you weren't using the word "amateur" in a derogatory sense. Traditionally, of course, archaeology has long attracted amateurs, and, thank goodness, it still does. The beginning of the Agora excavations, for instance, was made possible by the assurance of financial support from Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who had become an amateur of archaeology through seeing how the archaeologist could bring back to life the heart of an important old city, Williamsburg. In the project for the restoration of the Stoa of Attalos, Mr. Ward M. Canaday, long a member of the Board, was not only generous in his financial contributions but when we were hard pressed time-wise in raising matching money, pointed out how the productivity of the Greek marble workers could be speeded up by adopting methods which he had devised in the Overland Motor Company in the production of the jeep. More recently, Mr. James H. O. Ottaway, Jr., whose name is familiar from the *Wall Street Journal*, having developed an amateurish interest in archaeology, was elected to the School's board of trustees in 1988, and having shown a particular interest in the School's publication program, has introduced more modern ways which are already



speeding up production and saving money.

I could tell of a good many other gifted individuals who, having succumbed to the allure of archaeology and having been elected to the School's board, have worked together to raise money for particular needs of the School. Equally important, they have built up the School's portfolio to a level assuring an annual income that shields the academic members of the School's administration from much of the distracting necessity of raising money. In response to your question, I feel we should welcome amateurs and show them ways in which they can be very helpful while enjoying themselves immensely.

I'd like to say a little at this point about a problem that is bothering both the Managing Committee and the board of trustees at the School. It is now becoming urgent in the case of the Agora excavations but almost equally so in Corinth and in other sites where the School has played a role. I shall speak only for the Agora.

The School began fieldwork in the Agora in 1931. Since then there has been a continuous succession of activity with the exception of the World War II period (1939–1946). All of the originally programmed area has been excavated, together with fairly large additions to east and north. The planting of the excavated area and the construction of a site museum have been completed in keeping with the terms of the original agreement. The publication of the results, though by no means complete, is well started: thirty scholarly volumes, almost the same number of the more popular



Picture Books, and scores of articles. What remains to be done? My own feeling is that the School, having been given the great privilege of excavating the Athenian Agora, should make a great effort to complete the picture of the Agora that was in use from the sixth century B.C. into the fifth century A.D. We now know that the original Agora, the Agora of Theseus, lies to the east of our excavation. But that is another matter.

The current program of expropriation and excavation should yield an adequate knowledge of the Stoa Poikile and of the temple associated with the Altar of Aphrodite. Regarding the eastern half of the north side, I would recommend leaving for the present the row of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses that now border Hadrian Street as a sample of the domestic architecture so much of which was sacrificed to the recent excavation. In this area, as well as to the east of our own excavation, where the Agora of Theseus and also the eastern part of the Eleusinion certainly lie, opportunities to excavate should be carefully considered in areas made accessible temporarily by the demolition of old houses. The School should also keep in touch with the appropriate Greek authorities regarding their planning for the improvement of touristic circulation in this historic part of the city.

But to return to the area already excavated, as topographical studies continue, supplementary excavation will inevitably be required at many points. Furthermore, laboratory and study facilities must be maintained for the preparation of the many



volumes of publication still outstanding. Accommodation must also be provided for the many scholarly visitors who are entitled to access to the many kinds of basic evidence produced by the excavations. So the School must look forward to maintaining a working headquarters in the Agora, i.e., in the Stoa of Attalos, permanently. This, of course, has come to be the practice in all major excavations in Greece: Olympia, Delphi, the Athenian Kerameikos, Knossos, Samos, and many others. And the quality of a large archaeological excavation has come to be assessed in no small measure on the provision for permanent access to the site and finds.

The maintenance of such a base involves a budget. At one time I thought to assure long-term financial support for such a budget from the Getty Foundation, at a time when it was giving support to such worthy organizations as the Avery Library at Columbia University and Lilly Kahil's *Lexicon of Classical Mythology*.

[Tape VII, Side Two]

THOMPSON: One half the budgetary needs of the *Lexicon*, based in Switzerland, have for years been met by the Getty Foundation. But the idea was voted down as selling a birthright for a mess of porridge. So my successors will have to find the equivalent.

SMITH: Was the opposition based on the Getty's role in the acquisition of undocumented antiquities?

THOMPSON: Well that, unfortunately, was the most that was known about the





Getty by most people. It came at a very unfortunate moment. That period in the history of the Getty, I believe, has passed, and they are now doing many other splendid things.

SMITH: Over the course of time there have been shifts in funding sources. Before World War II it was primarily a few individuals who could give very large sums of money, but after the war foundations became a more important source, and perhaps some government funding. In that shift was there any change in the freedom of the scholars to do what they wanted to do, to set their own goals?

THOMPSON: No, none whatever.

SMITH: Do you see a shift away from foundations to private individuals again?

THOMPSON: No, the archaeologist is an opportunist; we've gotten support from most of the major American foundations. [interruption]

There are far more literary references to activities in the Agora than to the activities in the Acropolis and the Dipylon cemetery put together, far more. But the people on the archaeological side who concern themselves with Athens were blinded by the sheer fame and beauty of the Periclean buildings on the Acropolis; they were satisfied with those for a long time. As for the other buildings that served the civic needs of the city, many people I'm sure felt that they knew enough already from the ancient authors. Why go to the expense of excavating? Another of course very practical reason was that this area had been included in an area designated for



eventual excavation by the Greek state, and new building was not to be permitted in it. And then, as I think as I said the other day, the building crisis after the Smyrna Disaster of 1922 led to its opening up, and the Greek government was very grateful to us for stepping in and solving their dilemma. But, you see, the Acropolis was pretty thoroughly known as a result of the great excavations of the 1880s, but here we have only within the past few years reached anything like the same degree of complete knowledge of the Agora.

LYONS: I wanted to ask you a bit about the Archaeological Institute of America, because I know you've been a member of various different committees. I thought we should hear about some of your area work, as well as your assessment of the mission of the AIA in American classical archaeology.

THOMPSON: I've served on several of the AIA committees: proposal of names for honorary memberships; control of illegal importation of antiquities; and timing of general meetings. I also rose to a vice presidency. But I didn't want the presidency, being too busy with other matters.

Although I have been more active in the American School of Classical Studies at Athens and have felt closer to it, I have always felt that the School should take pride in being a daughter of the AIA. As for expressing an opinion about the mission of the AIA, I'm hesitant, having been increasingly out of touch in recent years. I recall the last words I heard from Rhys Carpenter at age eighty-five: "No sensible



scholar will continue to publish after age eighty." I myself was born in 1906, so what I say will be somewhat tentative and based chiefly on my own experience. In most countries that have played a prominent role in classical archaeology in our time, the active agencies have been supported in whole or in part by public money. I must confess that at times when we of the American School in Athens were feeling hard up we were inclined to envy our French or German colleagues who, it seemed, had only to ask for what they needed and it was forthcoming. But just as often in private talk we have heard those same colleagues say how they envied our ability to raise enough money from private sources to do such a job as, say, rebuilding the Stoa of Attalos.

I must admit, however, that we have accepted with gratitude, especially in the years soon after World War II, Fulbright Fellowships. I remember one excavation season when we had not less than five Fulbright Fellows on the staff of the Agora excavations. There have also been times in Athens when we of the American School have found it advantageous to be independent of Washington and so not at least directly responsible for dislike of what the U.S. government was doing or not doing in Turkey or Cyprus.

More recently in our work in Athens, as in many other excavations on classical sites, our scholars have rejoiced in grants from the NEH or the NEA. But we have also seen how uncertain those sources have been made by political intervention. However, I would not for a moment recommend as an alternative





course that the AIA should itself engage in actual excavation. The AIA tried that once, in Assos, from 1881 to 1883. The results of the excavation were of great interest and importance, but the dig left the AIA financially exhausted so that the publication appeared only in 1921. The best solution, as things now stand, is for the whole responsibility for a major excavation—the digging, study, and publication—to be assumed by a university or institute that has on its faculty a vigorous core of well qualified specialists in such areas as ancient languages and history, archaeology, anthropology, and art history. That, I believe, is the situation in most of our major undertakings today.

Another important area for which the central staff of the AIA must continue to exercise care is its marvelous network of local societies. Here again I plead ignorance because of my limited ability in recent years. In general I assume it is still true that every archaeologically minded community gets as good a local AIA society as it deserves. But I'm glad to note that the central staff still includes a vice president for societies, the present incumbent being the man who had built up one of the most successful local societies I ever encountered in the days when I lectured for the AIA.

As for my opinion about the mission of the AIA, I have no doubt that Claire had in mind chiefly the role to be played by its two principal publications, the *American Journal of Archaeology* and *Archaeology*. With the first issue of 1997, the *AJA* will be embarking on its second century and *Archaeology* will be starting its 50th



year; this is an opportune moment to review the roles of the two journals. I do think that they are doing well, both individually and as a complementary pair.

The *AJA* is definitely a scholarly work, written by and intended for scholars: heaps of footnotes, small type, good but strictly utilitarian illustrations, and little or no color. The introductory abstract for each article is an excellent idea. Layout and editing are also excellent. There are substantial articles on individual monuments and reviews of recent archaeological developments in various countries. The book review section is strong. The coverage focuses on the Mediterranean world, with occasional references to the Near East and Egypt.

*Archaeology*, on the other hand, is good journalism intended primarily for the intelligent amateur who wishes to keep up with remarkable discoveries in any part of the world. The layout and free use of color make *Archaeology* competitive with other glossy journals. There is much useful information about what is going on in museums worldwide, and offers of tours and cruises in the old world and the new. At \$4.95 each of the six numbers published in the year gives good value to those for whom it is intended and designed.

On the whole I would be inclined to keep fairly close to the present scheme: the *AJA* should cover the Mediterranean world and the adjacent areas that felt the impact of the classical while encouraging the magazine *Archaeology* to pay a little more attention to archaeological news of real interest in any part of the world.



LYONS: There's some talk at the AIA of expanding even more into world archaeology, being a voice for archaeology in other parts of the world, beyond the Mediterranean, with much more interdisciplinary contact with other archaeologists. How do you feel about that?

THOMPSON: As I have suggested before, the AIA might satisfy the interest in happenings in remote areas not by enlarging our printed coverage but by making it possible for the local societies to hear carefully chosen specialists, either American or foreign, to come as special lecturers on significant developments in the New World, in Asia, or in Scandinavia. Perhaps the best way of doing that is to bring more distinguished scholars from these extra-Mediterranean areas to lecture. A first-rate scholar can do so much to stir up interest in the local societies if he's given a big lectureship, meeting twenty or twenty-two local societies. I think that might be stressed more by the people who now run the committee on foreign lectures.

SMITH: Is the distinction that you see between classical Mediterranean studies and the other fields, the relationship to a body of literature, to a body of texts?

THOMPSON: That's one of the greatest, most important, and most obvious differences, yes. I sense that now with our increasing knowledge of the Mayan language. Now you have not quite literary but at any rate written evidence to collate with your archaeological evidence. You have these two types of evidence that must be collated one with the other, just as we have always had in classical archaeology,



and that makes the recent developments in Central America much more acceptable to the person who has grown up with Mediterranean archaeology. Of course for Scandinavia, the old runes still have an attraction for the Mediterranean archaeologist. There is written evidence, to be sure; it's very scanty, and only partially legible, but it does distinguish the northern Scandinavian. The case is different with Chinese archaeology because there's a vast body of literary evidence back of that, and the literary evidence and the new archaeological evidence are constantly being collated. This whole matter should be considered in a very broad way and at the highest level, with plenty of discussion also in the local societies.

SMITH: Do you have more questions on the AIA committees that you wanted to look into?

LYONS: No, I don't think so, but in thinking about the AIA there came to mind something else you said this morning, not so far way as China or Mesoamerica, but just a little bit to the west, and that would be the other great American foundation, the American Academy in Rome. I know in recent years, since the eighties, there has been much more collaboration between the School and the Academy, and students traveling back and forth. But how much interaction was there in the past between the two institutes?

THOMPSON: There's much more now than in my time, and I think it's all to the good. I think it's working out very well. You know, there is the fellowship now that





takes the student who has spent one year in Athens to Rome the following year, and vice versa, and that seems to be working well. There's also a move afoot to establish some similar form of communication between the school in Athens and the American Institute of Archaeology in Cyprus, and I hope that'll come about. I think that's very good. Any student going into classical archaeology should be advised very strongly to get firsthand knowledge of Italy, of Egypt, and of the Near East—Turkey, Syria, Jordan, at least as far as the Euphrates. That's absolutely essential nowadays.

LYONS: In the past was it the case that if students went to Greece they tended to stay there, or if they went to Rome they tended to make that their base?

THOMPSON: Yes, yes. It depends a lot on the personalities of the directors. I remember in the days when Professor Van Buren was director of the American Academy in Rome. He used to bring a group of his students from Rome over to Greece regularly every year, and they always spent a morning or two in the Agora excavations, so that they saw firsthand what was happening. Yes, that's very important, and more emphasis should be put on that by the AIA. Whether closer ties could be developed with our people in Egypt, I am not so sure. Machteld Mellink of course formed a very strong link between Athens and Turkey, and that has been marvelously productive I think—a better personal feeling, a better knowledge, and a better understanding of ancient Anatolia and of modern Turkey. It is interesting that this should have been done by a Dutch woman, but she knew Turkey very well, at



firsthand.

SMITH: Did you keep abreast of developments with the various Roman fora excavations?

THOMPSON: Yes, somewhat. I knew Frank Brown quite well. I didn't know many of the Italian archaeologists, though we had several of them here as Visiting Members at one time. But there's a young man now at Colgate University, up in upstate New York, Albert Ammerman is his name. He's a good scholar. He's been working on the geological history of Rome and its area. The history of the treatment of the Cloaca Maxima, for instance. I gather there are some very revealing studies along those lines. Recently he has turned to the Athenian Agora, and he has now got much interested in studying the impact of the Eridanos River in the development of the Agora in antiquity. These past several years he has been working steadily and systematically on building up a contour map of that whole part of Athens. The results are indeed interesting, and it's quite clear that the presence of the Eridanos there had a basic influence on the development of the north side of the Agora.

He has put in for a fellowship here at the institute for next year to sit down and write up the results of his work in Athens. I've got him to submit letters of support from those who know the results of his work in Rome. If he's going to stand any chance of getting a Visiting Membership here, he'll have to prove that his findings are of interest to ancient historians as well as to archaeologists. I had a good letter



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from him three or four days ago, and I think he's taking the right line. He says that people in Rome have been much impressed by the results of his work with archaeologists there.

We've followed the developments at Cosa quite closely here. I've just finished writing a strong supporting letter for Mrs. Kevin Clinton. For years she has been working on the sculpture found at Cosa, and now that the family members are more or less on their own feet, she would like to have a year of freedom to put down her thoughts about the sculpture of Cosa in general, particularly in relation to its context; that is, the sculpture found in the sanctuary, the sculpture found in the civic center in its relation to the civic buildings there, and the sculpture found in private houses in relation to their domestic context. This I think is a very good approach to the study of sculpture from a controlled excavation. She has looked into what is known on this aspect of the matter in other towns of Italy. But it becomes clear that one can study the matter perhaps better in Cosa than in any other town of Italy, and I was very glad to support her application. I have read most of her articles and heard her speak on the subject, and I was glad to back her.

LYONS: A number of distinguished Princeton graduates were trained in south Italy, not in Greece but in Sicily, in Morgantina, and you mentioned it this morning. It's going back a little bit, but I wanted to ask you about Eric Sjöqvist and Richard Stillwell, and perhaps your assessment of them as excavators and scholars.



THOMPSON: I think they did good work. They directed the excavations at Morgantina in alternate years. They were a very good team. They did very important work there and the results I think are impressive and something new in Sicilian archaeology, because here in the middle of the big island, they have brought to light what is essentially a Greek town. I have been very much interested in the gradual recovery of the scheme and history of their agora. Yes, we've kept closely in touch with the Princeton team. I have visited Morgantina only a couple of times. They have been very short visits, but I was impressed by what they were doing, and they are making a vigorous effort to recover the scheme and history of the agora.

I was able to contribute a little on one of these visits. They had just found something at the southwest corner of the agora, a rather curious building if you didn't know its purpose—several walls and foundations, and they had been discussing this at tea in the afternoon. They were at a complete loss how to interpret these foundations, but in the middle of the night I kept thinking about this, and I said to myself, "Why not call it a theater?" I mentioned this very gingerly at breakfast the following morning. Well, that was a completely new idea to them, but they said they would work on that idea for a while. Within a couple of weeks they reported that it was indeed a theater, dedicated to Dionysus.

We had another contact through Malcolm Bell, who was a disciple of my wife Dorothy. He had a high opinion of her as an old worker in the field, and she



developed a great admiration for him, especially when his book on the terra-cottas of Morgantina appeared. She regarded that as an excellent piece of work. It seems to me that as present director of the excavation he has also done good work. He has established very close and very useful working relations with the Italian authorities, and he seems to have a number of bright young people working on various aspects of Morgantina, so it's been a very good enterprise.

SMITH: Stillwell had also been an architect on the Athenian Agora project.

THOMPSON: He was our first architect, yes. He did some excellent work in our earliest excavations along the west side. It's amazing what he accomplished in really only one and a half seasons there. And he did a very good job on the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios, the Monument of the Eponymous Heroes, and the work on the Metroon. His work on all three of these monuments still stands; it's still important. All three of them of course have been reworked by Travlos and Dinsmoor, who have gotten farther with the restoration and the understanding of them, but Stillwell's work was very good. And he was very helpful in a general way. He and I had often talked about the restoration of the Stoa of Attalos, long before it was considered seriously as a possible museum. He favored greatly restoring the old building to make it really intelligible and enjoyable for all visitors, not only scholars but others too. He was closely connected for years with Corinth, and also with Antioch, so he had a very wide experience. He was editor of the *American Journal of Archaeology* for a long



time, and he was general editor of that admirable handbook, the *Topographic Guide to Classical Sites*, which is most useful. He had a subeditor, Marian Holland McAllister, but he had general oversight of it. I happened to be on the committee and I knew how they worked together. They were a very good team. Since then Marian McAllister has served many years as editor of the American School's publications.

We knew Dick's wife too, Agnes Stillwell, who did the potters' quarter at Corinth. I remember teaching her how to drive a car in Corinth. She was excavating way out a half mile from the excavation house. She was finding it a bit tiresome walking back and forth. She had had some training before, but I happened to be working there one season and gave her a little help. She did a splendid job on that potters' quarter, worked very hard on it, and got out her publication in good time, too. She died far too young—a great loss.

Sjöqvist's career was very interesting. He was already active in archaeology way back in 1925 or '26. When the Swedes excavated the tomb at Midea, which had been saved by my wife from being plundered, he was an active member of the team on the excavation. Already at that time he was secretary or personal assistant to the crown prince, who was also active in the excavation of the tomb, and he continued in that relationship for years to come. Then he spent many years in Rome, at the Swedish embassy, but eventually decided to turn to academic life proper. I don't know who invited him to join the Department of Art and Archaeology here at





Princeton—perhaps it was Richard Stillwell—but he was a very good addition to the department because he brought a very useful Swedish connection, and he did a lot of good work himself on fourth century B.C. sculpture. He took students over to Morgantina, where they got much valuable experience. He also took his former royal boss, who became virtually a professional archaeologist. Dorothy and I last saw him in a Swedish excavation in Tuscany, down on his knees, trowel in hand, cleaning fallen roof tiles.

I think this is a connection that should be cherished, the Scandinavian connection. I have had some very satisfactory dealings with the newest of the Scandinavian institutes in Rome, the Finnish. When they first got going, four years ago, they decided on making their theme song for the beginning, at any rate, Attica in late antiquity; and that was something that needed attention. They wanted to know about the inscriptions of the period. We had found a few, to which we gave the Finns free access. They made good use of them.

One of the most precious and informative documents that had previously been interpreted by a German scholar as an inscription from a funeral monument was shown by one of the young Finns to have been the dedicatory inscription for a statue of the empress Eudokia of the early fifth century A.D. The monument must have stood in front of the Odeion of Agrippa in its final form, and it led to a surer recognition of the origin of that late building. I am now pretty well convinced that it



was erected under her royal auspices, and that it served as a great royal villa, probably serving also as a residence for visiting VIPs of the imperial government. This was a constant problem in the provincial cities. Actually, one of the columns that was reused in the late building which we now call the Palace of the Giants bears a Christian cross. The empress was a convert to Christianity, and as converts often are, she was very enthusiastic and did a tremendous amount of church building. That is known from the literary evidence. This great building of ours that occupied the central part of the old agora from the early fifth century A.D. on was probably designed by a man who had already designed big Christian churches of the same period. But it's not a sacred building; it's a villa-like building, chiefly a residence, but also equipped to serve state functions as well, with a huge colonnaded courtyard, and places for speakers.



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